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Material Factors Affecting the Publication of Black British Fiction

**Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of The Open University, in the
discipline of English Literature, April 2010**

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines some of the material factors affecting the publication of black British fiction during the last three decades of the twentieth century. It argues that a study of the publishing history of black British fiction in this period must take into account wider political and cultural issues, as well as the internal structure and mechanics of book publishing. It therefore explores how shifting cultural, political and commercial contexts influenced the selection, marketing, supply and reception of a number of black British texts. The importance of the interaction between such 'external' factors and the 'internal' modus operandi of book production and distribution is highlighted throughout. A distinctive aspect of this thesis is its use of archives and personal testimonies provided by significant figures in publishing as key sources of information.

The Introduction sets out the scope of the thesis, addressing, in particular, the label 'black British' and how it is to be used within the study. It also situates the research firmly within the discipline of Book History, considering some of the most influential models that have been proposed to help us understand the circulation of books in society.

Part One establishes the historical context. Beginning with the early publication of black writers from the Caribbean in Britain in the 1950s and 1960s, it moves on to consider the ways in which black writers and writing were affected by changing political and cultural agendas throughout this period. It investigates the effect of multicultural policies and practice upon education and librarianship, as well as the response of local government and the Arts Council strategy to the changing make-up of British society, arguing that the impact of these wider developments had a significant influence upon the publication of black British fiction.

Part Two focuses on publishers, publishing and prizes. It opens by offering a critical analysis of the activities and legacy of two pioneering black British publishers, both established in Britain in the late 1960s: New Beacon Books and Bogle L'Ouverture. The contrasting approach of the niche publisher X Press provides an example of the variety of ways in which autonomous black British presses evolved over the course of three decades.

Comparisons are made with the role played by feminist publishers in Britain in the promotion of fiction by marginal groups, and it is argued that the market success of African American women's writing was an important influence on decisions by feminist publishers to publish black British women writers in the UK.

This is followed by a detailed investigation of the literary prize phenomenon and its influence upon the publication of black British fiction. The final chapter of the thesis proffers a critical account of the success of some black British novelists in the light of this phenomenon. It argues that literary prizes with very specific entry criteria were to have a marked influence upon the literary careers of a handful of black British writers, and that this in turn had the effect of raising the profile of black British fiction more generally, thus demonstrating its commercial viability.

In conclusion, it is argued that the period from the early 1980s to the 2000s represented a very specific and important moment in the publishing history of black British fiction. There still remains a role in the current market for a number of different publishers of black British fiction. This now needs to be viewed, however, within a context where the relevance and contemporary significance of the label 'black British' is constantly being reassessed.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am sincerely grateful to those individuals who agreed to be interviewed by me in the course of this research, and who have contributed their thoughts and recollections of publishing and the development of black British literature. In particular I would like to thank Margaret Busby, Sarah White and Eric and Jessica Huntley, whose reminiscences are included in the Appendices. I am thankful also to Alastair Niven, Lyn Innes, Vicky Unwin, Liz Gerschel and Anne Walmsley, who kindly agreed to speak with me in person, by email and on the telephone at various times. All of their personal testimonies have helped me to bring this publishing history to life. I would also like to thank all the archivists who facilitated much of the primary research for this thesis.

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INTRODUCTION

The dawn of the twenty-first century saw the occurrence of certain events that put black British fiction firmly on the literary map. Arguably the most high profile of these events was the publication of Zadie Smith's debut novel, *White Teeth* (2000), which became something of a publishing phenomenon.¹ It initially drew attention to itself when it became the focus of a bidding war in 1997 on the basis of a few unfinished chapters and Smith accepted a six-figure advance for this as well as a future novel. It has been widely observed that this sizeable advance was particularly remarkable because it was offered when the author was only 21 years old and still an undergraduate student at Cambridge University.² The success of *White Teeth* catapulted its author to literary fame and fortune. The novel was endorsed by the world-renowned writer and novelist Salman Rushdie, who hailed it 'an astonishingly assured debut'.³ It received mainly positive reviews, both nationally and internationally, won several awards (including the Whitbread First Novel Award), and achieved sales of over a million copies.⁴

Smith's ethnic origins – her father was a white Englishman and her mother a black Jamaican – were commented upon both prior to and after the publication of *White Teeth*. Her 'perfect demographic[s]',⁵ combined with the novel's multicultural themes gave credence to the book's standing as a representation of contemporary Britain.⁶ Other black British first-time novelists followed in the wake of Smith's success. A good example is

¹ Zadie Smith, *White Teeth* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2000).

² *Contemporary Writers: Zadie Smith*, The British Council. Available: <http://www.contemporarywriters.com/authors/?p=auth257> [24 January 2010].

³ Rushdie's comments were printed on the back cover of the 2000 edition of the novel, alongside similarly flattering remarks taken from reviews in the *Guardian*, *i-D*, *Literary Review* and *New York Times*.

⁴ See Julie Ellam, *Zadie Smith - critical perspective* (2007), The British Council. Available: <http://www.contemporarywriters.com/authors/?p=auth257#criticalperspective> [5 October 2009].

⁵ Simon Hattenstone, 'White Knuckle Ride', *Guardian*, 11 December 2000, G2, p 6.

⁶ See Claire Squires, 'Fiction in the Marketplace: The Literary Novel and the UK Publishing Industry' (unpublished DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 2002), pp.273-274. Squires's thesis was subsequently published as a book entitled *Marketing Literature: The Making of Contemporary Writing in Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007; repr. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009). This particular reference can be found on pp. 178-9 of the 2009 paperback edition of the book. All further references are taken from this, most recent, publication unless stated otherwise.

Helen Oyeyemi, who was born in Nigeria and moved to Britain aged four and whose first two novels – *The Icarus Girl* (2005) and *The Opposite House* (2007), both published by Bloomsbury – deal with the immigrant experience in modern Britain. Oyeyemi was in fact tagged with the slightly dubious accolade of ‘being the next Zadie Smith’ when she secured a record-breaking £400,000 book deal for a novel written whilst she was doing her ‘A’ Levels. She too was later a student at Cambridge University.⁷

This thesis traces the publication of black British fiction over the three decades prior to Zadie Smith’s entrance onto the literary scene, focussing in particular on some of the material factors affecting this history. It takes as its starting point a comment made by Thomas R. Adams and Nicolas Barker regarding the importance of publishing in the history of any printed or written material. According to them,

The decision to publish, not the creation of the text, is [...] the first step in the creation of a book. The nature of the text and, in some but not all instances, the intention of the author are factors in this decision, but other forces control it that have little to do with the intrinsic merit of the text.⁸

The thesis will focus on those ‘forces’ – creative, commercial and ideological – that have influenced the decisions of publishers who published particular black British texts. To understand the nature of these ‘forces’, we first need to consider some of the trends and issues affecting publishers in the second half of the twentieth century, as well as the broader commercial and cultural context in which *all* publishers were operating at this time.

* * *

During the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, profound changes took place within British publishing, to the extent that the characteristics of the modern publishing scene bear very little resemblance to those of only half a century earlier. John Feather has described how

⁷ Andrew Pierce, ‘There once was a poet who came out of a shed to put two books to bed’, *The Times*, 13 April 2004, p. 6.

⁸ Thomas R. Adams and Nicolas Barker, ‘A New Model for the Study of the Book’, in *A Potencie of Life: Books in Society*, ed. by Nicolas Barker (London: British Library, 1993), pp. 5-43 (p. 18).

‘the classic model of a British publishing house was that of a family business, the creation of one man and often developed in an idiosyncratic pattern which reflected his own tastes and preoccupations’.⁹ This mode of publishing was all but defunct by the end of the twentieth century when the publishing industry comprised not independent family-run businesses, but large commercial, multimedia conglomerates. By 1990, the UK book market was dominated by a small number of major groups involved in many different publishing activities and incorporating a number of established publishing imprints.¹⁰ Operating alongside these big corporations was a small group of truly independent publishing houses: old established houses which were often owned by individuals and family trusts and who made modest profits, and a new collection of independents. Most of these independents were specialists. As Peter Owen tells us in his assessment of some of the challenges faced by independent publishing houses at the end of the twentieth century, ‘the most distinguished houses have an “image” and are known for best-sellers or commercial books, good non-fiction, children’s books or quality literature’.¹¹

Owen is speaking here from the perspective of a small, independent publisher specialising in quality fiction and non-fiction from around the world. It is clear however, that independents were finding it increasingly difficult to survive, and that consolidation within publishing was the major feature of the late twentieth-century publishing industry. In 2000, American publisher Andre Schriffin observed that ‘[globally] publishing has changed more in the last ten years than in the entirety of the previous century’.¹² These remarks were echoed four years later by Eric de Bellaigue, who declared that ‘today’s

⁹ John Feather, ‘Book Publishing in Britain: An Overview’, *Media, Culture and Society*, 15 (1993), pp. 167-181 (p.170).

¹⁰ These groups included Random Century (an amalgamation of Random House and Century Hutchinson, incorporating the British imprints Bodley Head, Chatto and Windus and Jonathan Cape), HarperCollins (created by the dual purchase of Collins in the UK and Harper & Row in the USA by News International), Pearson (which acquired Longman in the 1970s and subsequently also Penguin Books), and Reed International (in control of Octopus Books and Heinemann).

¹¹ Peter Owen, *Publishing Now* (London: Peter Owen, 1993; rev. edn., London: Peter Owen, 1996), p. 32.

¹² Andre Schriffin, *The Business of Books: How International Conglomerates Took Over Publishing and Changed the Way We Read* (London and New York: Verso, 2000), p. 6.

publishing structures carry only faint echoes of the prewar period'.¹³ In his collection of essays, *British Book Publishing as a Business since the 1960s*, de Bellaigue presents a critical analysis of the modern publishing scene. He traces merger and acquisition activity from 1960s to the turn of the century and considers some of the underlying reasons for this activity. Some of the key trends and issues affecting modern book publishing, he says, involve the following: conglomeration and the effect of this upon literary standards; increased focus on profitability; the rise of the literary agent; self-publishing; new production methods and technological advances; and venture capital investment in various forms of publishing. To this list can be added increasing professionalization and market-focus, short-termism, integration of hardback and paperback publishing within the same company, centralisation in publishing and book selling, the growing strength of book retailers (and of supermarkets in particular) and discounting.¹⁴ The abolition of the Net Book Agreement (NBA) in 1995 enacted an additional, and fundamental, change upon publishing. The demise of the NBA effectively ended self-imposed constraints on publishers and booksellers that dictated the minimum retail price of all books (with the exception, perhaps, of educational books for schools). Under the terms of the Agreement, the publisher had set the minimum retail price and the bookseller agreed to abide by this price in return for a trade price that was usually discounted by 30%. The financial relationship between publishers and booksellers changed once bookshops were able, for the first time in nearly a century, to compete on the price of their products. Publishers, on the other hand, found it more complicated to determine the recommended retail price necessary to facilitate a profit. All of this added to the increasing sense of competition within modern publishing more generally.

¹³ Eric de Bellaigue, *British Book Publishing as a Business since the 1960s: Selected Essays* (London: The British Library, 2004), p. 1.

¹⁴ For further information about some of the trends and issues affecting producers of books in the twentieth century see Owen, *Publishing Now*; Iain Stevenson, "'The liveliest of corpses': Trends and Challenges for the Future of the Book Publishing Industry", *Aslib Proceedings*, 52 (2000), pp. 133-137; John Feather, *Communicating Knowledge: Publishing in the 21st Century* (München: K.G. Saur, 2003); Eva Hemmungs Wirtén, 'The Global Market 1970-2000: Producers', in *A Companion to the History of the Book*, ed. by Simon Eliot and Jonathan Rose (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), pp. 395-405. A number of the trends and issues have been covered by *The Bookseller* which has a searchable archive available online.

Adams and Barker remind us that ‘the most familiar kind of publishing is commercial’ in so much that costs must be met and there is, more often than not, the expectation of a profit.¹⁵ Customarily, even the most philanthropic of publishers have required that their books make a profit in order to facilitate further publishing pursuits. However, from the 1960s onwards, as the commercial aspect of book publishing began to dominate, the requirement to make a profit became increasingly more urgent. This led publishing companies to adopt an increasingly market-based and short-term approach to publishing. In general, this approach resulted in more intensive marketing and promotional activities such as bookshop readings, literary festivals, media appearances, and promotional tours. Claire Squires has coined the phrase ‘commodification and celebritization’ to describe the promotional frenzy that has surrounded certain authors and their work in recent years. It is, she argues, a phenomenon that has been further enhanced by the media attention generated by literary prizes.¹⁶

Traditionally, the publication of literary fiction (which can be described as high quality fiction that might be expected to have a relatively restricted sale) has required a long-term view. More recently, a short-term approach to publishing fiction has prevailed. This approach is characterised by a rise in the number of new titles published each year. Statistical data provided by John Feather in *Communicating Knowledge* reveals a significant growth in book publishing in Britain during the 1990s. Between 1998 and 1999, for instance, the number of titles published in the UK increased by 5.7%. At the same time the value of publishers’ sales increased by 5%. In fact, the value of sales increased nearly every year between 1990 and 1999.¹⁷ Alongside this, greater emphasis has been placed by sales and marketing functions upon a small number of potentially best-selling titles and big-selling authors. One publisher explained in an article for *The Independent* in 1999, how the dominance of the bestseller was an inevitable consequence of the commercialisation of

¹⁵ Adams and Barker, ‘A New Model for the Study of the Book’, p. 16.

¹⁶ Claire Squires, ‘Novelistic Production and the Publishing Industry in Britain and Ireland’, in *A Companion to the British and Irish Novel 1945-2000*, ed. by Brian W Shaffer, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), p. 191.

¹⁷ Feather, *Communicating Knowledge*, p. 46.

publishing: 'In the corporations, the emphasis now had to be on best-sellers. Overheads were so enormous and the demand for return by investors so great, that the only frame of mind was best-sellerdom'.¹⁸ Together with the best-seller phenomenon came frenzied auctions for new authors, huge advances for a select few debut novels – with Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* being a prime example – and the relentless search for the so-called 'next big thing'.

* * *

These are some of the major changes that helped to shape the modern publishing scene. Some of the other issues that had a significant affect on publishers and the wider book industry will be highlighted throughout the thesis. Chapter Four, for example, looks at how relations between libraries, publishers and suppliers of black British books (who were often one and the same) played a central role in meeting the needs of an emerging black British readership.

The aim of this chapter, and the rest of Part One, is to contextualise the second half of the thesis against a backdrop of relevant socio-cultural developments. As such, Chapter Two provides a short history of multiculturalism in Britain since the 1970s. In Chapter Three, it is argued that subsequent developments in multicultural education had a significant bearing upon publishers of black British fiction. Chapter Five, 'State support for black British Literature', reveals how the development of black British literature and its publication was assisted by certain local governments and arts organisations. In this chapter, some of the specific difficulties faced by many smaller independent publishers are highlighted and examples are given of instances when financial support was offered by public bodies to help address some of the day to day problems encountered by black publishers specifically.

Part Two is an examination of some of the negotiations between the industry, culture and society that came about as result of changes in British publishing, and which coincided with the development of contemporary black British literature. The first two chapters in

¹⁸ Robin Baird-Smith, 'A Lament for Publishing', *The Independent*, 26 September 1999, p. 9.

this section compare and contrast the activities of three, very different, black publishers in Britain – New Beacon Books, Bogle L'Ouverture and the X Press – in order to demonstrate how black British book publication evolved. Attention then turns to the publication of black British women writers by feminist presses and by women-led publishing collectives. Particular consideration is paid to the role played by these publishing organisations in selecting, promoting and distributing the work of women from marginal groups who were unable to access the mainstream.

Finally, Chapter Nine examines the influence of one of the major trends of twentieth century publishing – the modern prize phenomenon. It is argued that both individual writers and black British fiction more generally gained from the commercial and cultural prestige conferred upon literary prize winners and their publishers. To illustrate this, an account is given of the critical and commercial success of two black British novelists, Diran Adebayo, winner of the SAGA Prize, a bespoke literary prize for black British authors, and Orange Prize winner, Andrea Levy.

* * *

John Feather reminds us that publishing is continuously being redefined by social, cultural and technological change.¹⁹ It is therefore important to see the trends and issues above as being part of the wider environment in which all books were produced and circulated. These are just some of the factors that have had an effect upon the transmission of texts from author to reader. This thesis draws on the idea of the 'sociology of the text', a concept put forward by Don McKenzie in 1981, and which Finkelstein and McCleery tell us is his acknowledgement that texts come into being as the result of a collaborative process, a process that involves the material object and its production and reception.²⁰ In this thesis, therefore, primary attention is paid, not to the *contents* of specific books, but to the means by which the physical texts were produced and the manner in which they were received.

¹⁹ Feather, *Communicating Knowledge*, p. x.

²⁰ Don McKenzie cited in David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery, 'Theorizing the history of the book' in *An Introduction to Book History*, ed. by David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 7-27 (p. 11).

Don McKenzie's work was linked to early moves towards the modern concept of the History of the Book.²¹ Book historians believe that a holistic approach to the study of books is essential to an understanding of the importance of their place in history. Over the years, they have put forward a number of theoretical models for the circulation of books and texts in society.²² The first and still the best-known of these models appeared in 1982, in Robert Darnton's groundbreaking essay, 'What is the History of Books'. Here he proposed a model which he termed the 'Communications Circuit', which ran chronologically from author to publisher to reader via printer, shipper, bookseller and other agents. The circuit was influenced by economic, social, political, and cultural systems within society (Figure 1).²³ Darnton did not, however, expand in great detail upon the specific nature of these external influences, saying only that these could 'vary endlessly'.²⁴ In her study of the publishing of modern fiction, Claire Squires has argued that Darnton deliberately failed to elaborate upon these 'other elements in society'. She attributes this omission to the fact that their lack of clear definition is in direct conflict with the more obviously commonsensical nature of the 'circuit'. Any attempt to interrogate them would, she argues, destabilise the overall coherence of its structure and disrupt its usefulness as a seamless model of transmission.²⁵ Nevertheless, this lack of definition and clear direction from Darnton – he rather modestly admits that his 'circuit' need not be applied at all – does mean that his 'circuit' can be adopted and adapted with relative ease.²⁶ Simone Murray, for example, proposed a 'rewiring' of the circuit in order to take into consideration and to analyse the politics of feminist publishing and publishers.²⁷ Her justification for this was

²¹ For more information about the early days of the History of the Book, see Finkelstein and McCleery, *An Introduction to Book History*.

²² For an introductory survey of the main theories and themes that developed in book history studies over the course of the twentieth century see Finkelstein and McCleery, 'Theorizing the history of the book' in *An Introduction to Book History*.

²³ Robert Darnton, 'What is the History of Books?' in *The Book History Reader*, ed. by David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery (1990), pp. 9-26.

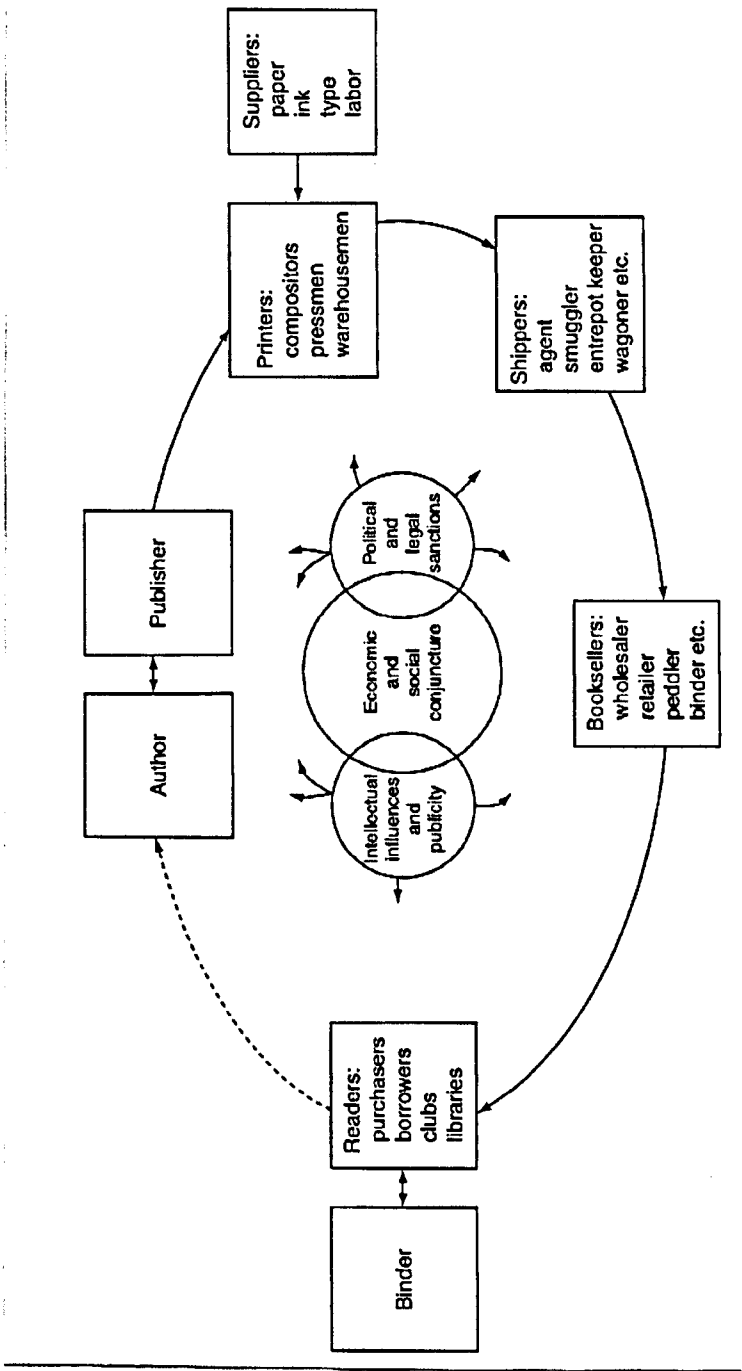
²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

²⁵ Squires, *Marketing Literature*, p.52.

²⁶ Darnton, 'What is the History of Books?', p. 17.

²⁷ Simone Murray, *Mixed Media: Feminist Presses and Publishing Politics* (London: Pluto Press, 2004), pp. 13-17.

Figure 1: Darnton's Communications Circuit



that, despite its claims for universality, the Darnton ‘circuit’ was a gender- as well as a period-specific construction that did not take into account the role of women at any point.²⁸

Despite these and other reservations, Darnton’s remains a useful theoretical model. It allows a number of potentially disparate elements to be connected, and simultaneously takes into account the influence of factors outside of the life cycle of the book that affect its production and its transmission throughout society. It was, and still is, a means by which historians might begin to conceptualise the study of book history. Just as others have taken Darnton’s communications circuit and adapted or ‘rewired’ it to suit their purpose, it has proved to be a useful point of departure from which to begin this thesis.

As we have seen, Darnton’s model was not without its faults. Some of its problems can be attributed to Darnton’s very specific focus on eighteenth-century printing and publishing conditions, which has made it rather difficult to transpose into earlier and later periods of study. Thomas R. Adams and Nicholas Barker have also criticised it for placing too much emphasis upon the agents involved in the processes through which a book passes – the people – rather than the book itself.²⁹ In response to Darnton, they proposed a ‘New Model for the Study of the Book’ (Figure 2). Like Darnton’s ‘circuit’, this ‘new model’ was presented as ‘a circle of connected elements’.³⁰ It differed, however, in its emphasis upon the processes involved in the life of a book – publishing, manufacturing, distribution, reception and survival – not the functionaries who initiated those processes. Adams and Barker also changed the position of the book itself within the model, placing it at the centre of the model with external forces working on it from the outside. In so doing, they reversed Darnton’s model which placed external forces in the middle of the circuit with their influence working outwards upon the author, publisher, booksellers, and so on.

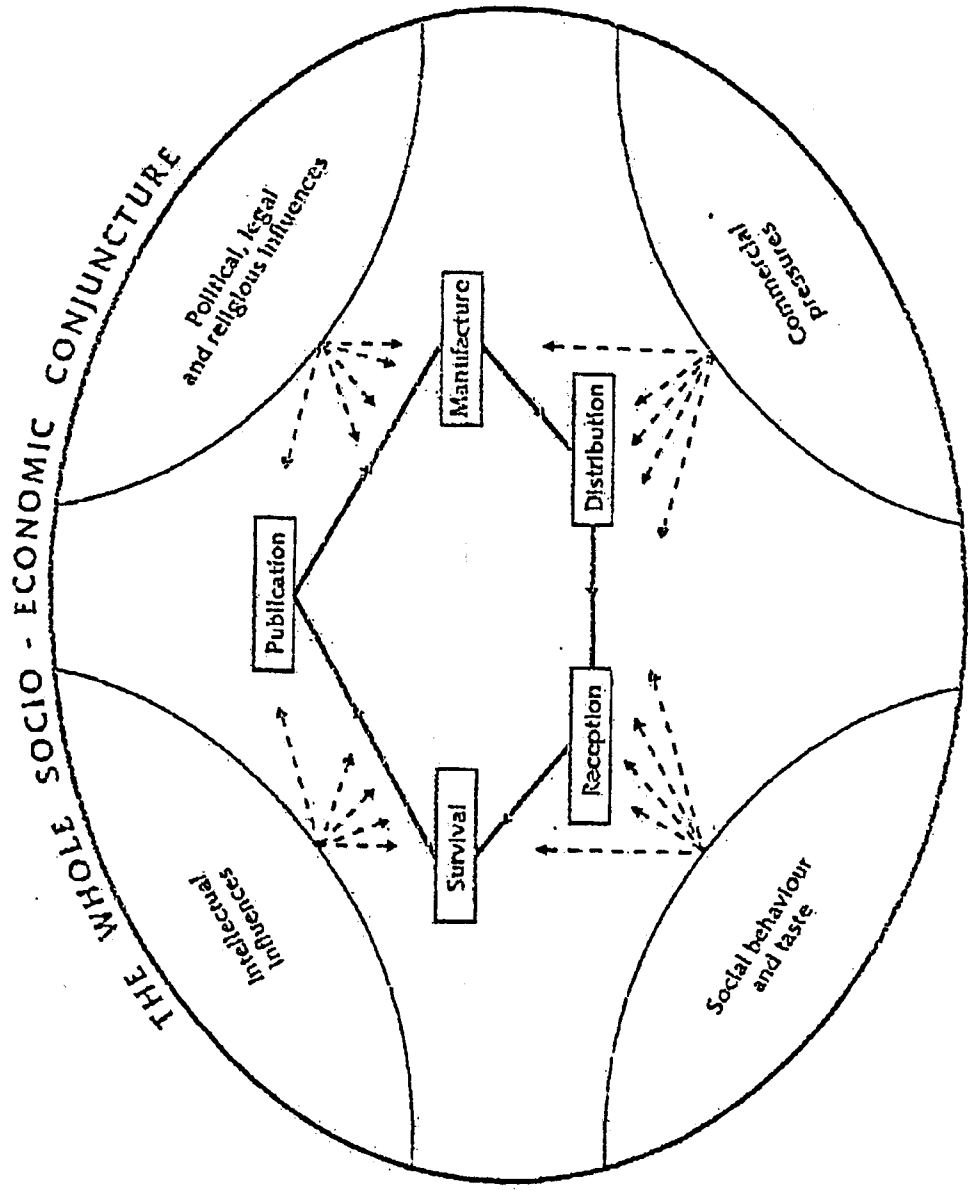
Claire Squires, for example, argues in favour of Adams and Barker’s revised ‘model’ over Darnton’s ‘circuit’ in her critical assessment of the various methods that have been proposed in an attempt to theorise the history of the book. Their ‘model’, she says, proves

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

²⁹ Adams and Barker, ‘A New Model for the Study of the Book’, p. 12.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

Figure 2: Adams and Barker's New Model for the Study of the Book



itself more flexibly responsive to the variant modes of activity that affect books.³¹ At the same time however, Squires does draw attention to their incomplete theorisation of what they describe as ‘the external forces that exert influence on the circuit’.³²

Squires frames and positions her study of the marketing and publishing of British fiction from the 1990s to the present in the space between author and reader on the ‘Communications Circuit’. She does not confine her examination of marketing practices to this part of the ‘circuit’, however, since, she argues, these also infiltrate the areas of production, dissemination and reception of texts. According to Squires, marketing is the summation of multiple agencies operating at any one time within the literary marketplace. The role played by ‘communications’ – in every sense of the word – in the marketing of literature is crucial to Squires’s argument. She sees similarities between the process of marketing, i.e. the selling of a product, which can take on a circular route – from vendor to buyer and back again – and some of the models in Book History. Thus she explores in detail Darnton’s ‘circuit’ and Adams and Barker’s revision of this model, in addition to Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of a ‘field of cultural production’; drawing upon all three as theoretical bases for her study.³³

In offering his own critique of Darnton’s ‘circuit’, Peter McDonald had also drawn upon Pierre Bourdieu’s sociological theory of the ‘literary field’, a decade earlier.³⁴ In his Introduction to *British Literary Culture and Publishing Practice, 1880-1914* (1997)³⁵ he identified a number of limitations with Darnton’s ‘interactive model’, one of which was its emphasis on the functions involved in the process of production.³⁶ McDonald argued that

³¹ Squires, *Marketing Literature*, p. 53.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 57.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 54-58.

³⁴ See Pierre Bourdieu, ‘The Field of Cultural Production’, first published in 1993, in *The Book History Reader*, ed. by David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 77-99.

³⁵ McDonald’s Introduction to *British Literary Culture* appears to be a revised version of a paper presented to the Bibliographical Society in 1996 and which was published in 1997: Peter McDonald, ‘Implicit Structures and Explicit Interactions: Pierre Bourdieu and the History of the Book’, *The Library*, 19 (1997), pp. 105-121. All references to McDonald’s revision of Darnton’s ‘circuit’ are taken from this article.

³⁶ Squires also cites McDonald’s summary of Bourdieu’s field on p. 56 of *Marketing Literature*.

these failed ‘to reckon on the other ways in which a literary culture is structured, and as a consequence, [...] write out a further dimension to the overall process of production and consumption’.³⁷ Utilising Bourdieu’s concept of the ‘literary field’, McDonald enlarged the scope of Darnton’s circuit. He added a further, hierarchical dimension to the ‘communications circuit’ by which it might be possible to trace a text’s journey from author to reader *and* to take into account each agent’s status in the field of literary production and the complex networks within which these agents operate, thus incorporating the concept of structural relations into book history. By introducing Bourdieu’s notion of the ‘field’, McDonald argued that it was possible to envisage a literary world made up of ‘a multicultural hierarchy of structurally related communications circuits’.³⁸ McDonald’s vision was of ‘an integrated network of communications circuits in which writers, publishers, printers, distributors, reviewers and readers collaborate’.³⁹ This thesis adds to this list of collaborating agents, librarians, educationalists, the organisers of literary prizes, and members of arts organisations.

McDonald advocated considering not only the horizontal circuit of functional interactions, from writer to reader, but also the vertical hierarchy of structural relations which allows the book historian to consider the publishing agents not merely as functionaries, or united simply by a shared network of personal or professional ties, but as ‘symbolic brokers’ of ‘cultural legitimacy and generational imperatives’ in the hierarchy.⁴⁰ A pertinent example of McDonald’s theory in practice is provided here in Chapter Seven, ‘Redefining black publishing in Britain: the X Press model’, which highlights a specific moment when generational conflict between black publishers in Britain came to a head in a television programme, ‘Devil’s Advocate’. During the course of this show, Darcus Howe – editor of the radical campaigning magazine *Race Today* from 1974 to 1984 – lambasted the X Press – established in 1992 by Dotun Adebayo and Steve Pope – for its overtly

³⁷ McDonald, ‘Implicit Structures and Explicit Interactions’, p. 111.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

commercial publication of low brow black British fiction. The different positions of Howe and Adebayo and Pope indicate that the field of black British literary production exhibits what McDonald described as a 'hierarchical structure' and can be regarded as a site of 'cultural contest'.⁴¹

Mary Hammond similarly appropriated Bourdieu's idea of the 'field' in her examination of the interaction between writers, readers and publishers in late-nineteenth/early twentieth century England and the effect of this upon the formation of literary tastes.⁴² Her use of Bourdieu's model is evidence of a growing awareness amongst book historians of the limitations associated with some of the early models put forward as a means by which to conceptualise the History of the Book. Hammond criticises McDonald for failing to carry through the advice that he gives to consider the collaboration between *all* agents – publishers, printers, distributors, reviewers and readers. He tends instead, she says, to focus on publishers and authors, and ignores the roles played by readers and distributors in the literary field in late-Victorian England.⁴³

Furthermore, Hammond reproaches McDonald for falling into the trap of focussing too much upon *male* novelists, critics and publishers, and excluding the 'significant presence of [contemporary] women journalists, editors and publishers' readers'.⁴⁴ In so doing, she argues, McDonald presents a male-dominated reading of the literary field of the 1890s. Robert Darnton was similarly criticised by Simone Murray for offering a male gender-biased presentation of Book History. Books like Hammond's, which deliberately sets out to consider both male and female novelists, and Murray's research into feminist publishing, seek to redress this imbalance.⁴⁵ They also evidence a move towards looking

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

⁴² Mary Hammond, *Reading, Publishing and the Formation of Literary Taste in England, 1880-1914* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁴⁵ Murray's chapter 'Books of Integrity: Dilemmas of Race and Authenticity in Feminist Publishing' in *Mixed Media*, pp.66-96, centres on the feminist presses that she considers to be most closely associated with multicultural writing – The Women's Press, Sheba Feminist Publishers, Black Woman Talk and Urban Fox Press. It has provided valuable background material for Chapter Eight of this thesis.

more broadly at the entire literary 'field', to take into account a variety of producers, recipients and agencies involved in the life of a text.

This thesis fits in with projects such as Murray's and Hammond's, which are intended to illuminate aspects of book history that have previously been marginalised, or omitted entirely. It too adheres to the notion of a dynamic literary 'field', in which any number of players and communications circuits might interact or intersect at any point, in order to interrogate the role played by internal agents and external forces in shaping the history of black British book publication. These external forces are included among the 'material factors' referred to in the title of this thesis. This term is used both in the sense of 'important', 'significant', 'relevant' factors in the development of black British fiction publication, and to refer to the specifics of book publication – the facts or events that had a direct impact upon publishing decisions.

In using publishers' archives to explore the publishing history of certain texts, the thesis takes its cue from Robert Darnton's observation that the papers of publishers 'are the richest of all sources for the history of books'.⁴⁶ Early investigations within publishers' archives and other repositories shed light on many different aspects of this research. These helped direct the focus of subsequent work and in turn influenced the shaping of the final thesis. The following archives were identified at the outset as housing potentially useful collections, and were subsequently visited: The Faber Archive in London; the archives of Heinemann Educational Books at the University of Reading; the Anne Walmsley Archive (Caribbean Literature) housed at the University of Sussex in Brighton; the Arts Council of Great Britain archives at the Victoria and Albert Museum; and the archives of Bogle L'Ouverture Publications Limited at the London Metropolitan Archives, the largest local authority archive in the UK.

The Faber Archive is notoriously difficult to access and, as with many other publishers, it is doubtful that their collection can ever provide a comprehensive history of the publisher or the writers they courted. However, the material that was examined, which

⁴⁶ Darnton in Finkelstein and McCleery, *The Book History Reader*, p. 18.

included publishing files for Wilson Harris, Caryl Philips and Earl Lovelace, did afford useful insights into Faber's relationship with some of its authors. Furthermore, in terms of trying to establish the motivation of different publishers of black writers during the mid-twentieth century, the Wilson Harris files, which contained mainly correspondence between the author, publisher and other agents, were the most detailed and provided much of the evidence used here in Chapter One.

Evidence collected for Chapter Three came about, in the first instance, via conversations with Professor Lyn Innes and Liz Gerschel (in person), Vicky Unwin (by email) and Anne Walmsley (by telephone). These prompted visits to the Anne Walmsley Archive at the University of Sussex⁴⁷ and to Reading University, home to the Heinemann Educational Books archive. At the time the latter was in the process of being relocated and some information was not available. Nevertheless, it was important to visit this repository to seek out information concerning Heinemann's publication of certain black writers who at one time made Britain their home. My research was focussed upon a relatively small number of the files within this sizeable archive that related to authors who were published within Heinemann's African Writers Series. One such writer was Buchi Emecheta. Unfortunately, none of the files viewed at the University of Reading or elsewhere, contained sales figures. In fact, where this type of data is referred to in this thesis, this has been sourced instead from secondary and anecdotal sources.

In many instances, it was personal contact with individuals who had lived through the period that provided the impetus for further archival research. It was through discussions with Margaret Busby, for example, who published some of Emecheta's early novels, and as a result of visits to the archive at Reading I was able to supplement the picture gained by secondary reading, and could begin to identify which black writers were published in Britain during period, and to begin to ascertain the reasoning behind their publication.

⁴⁷ Walmsley proved to be a prolific letter writer. The Anne Walmsley Archive (Caribbean Literature) at Sussex University Library Special Collections is home to a great deal of correspondence between her and many of the West Indian authors that she published during her time with Longman in the Caribbean, and after.

It was extremely fortuitous that the launch of the Bogle L'Ouverture Publications Limited archive coincided with the start of this research. The timely launch of this archive made available a wealth of material concerning various aspects of the life and work of Eric and Jessica Huntley, information which served to augment a conversation between the Huntleys and myself which took place at their home in January 2007. However, because of its newness, not all of the material amassed by the Huntleys had been catalogued and was immediately accessible. There is vast scope for further research within this particular archive, and it is, undoubtedly, a valuable source of information for any researcher investigating the history of black people in Britain in the future.

In terms of this research, a number of common themes emerged out of archival investigations and via conversations with key figures in publishing, education, and the Arts. The importance of the contemporary feminist movement, the role played by International Book Fair of Radical Black and Third World Books and the significance of developments in multiculturalism, are just three examples. These themes became the basis of some of the chapters in this thesis. One particular issue that arose during conversations with both David Dabydeen and Dr Alastair Niven was the Fiona Pitt-Kethley case, which is discussed in Chapter Five. Several visits to the archive of the Arts Council of Great Britain, 1928-1997 helped to further explain some of the pieces of the Pitt-Kethley puzzle. These visits were doubly useful, in that valuable information concerning the Greater London Council's involvement with the development of ethnic arts during the 1980s was also uncovered. This reinforced the impression given elsewhere of importance of the role played by the Council in sponsoring ethnic minority arts projects and initiatives, one of which, as we shall see, was the publication of Prabhu Gupta's first black British bibliography in 1986.⁴⁸

This thesis, therefore, draws heavily on primary evidence uncovered in publishers' archives and other depositories. It is an approach has been employed by other scholars.

⁴⁸ Prabhu Gupta, *Black British Literature: An Annotated Bibliography* (Sydney; Coventry: Dangaroo Press, 1986).

Gail Low, for example, has looked in depth at the publication of Amos Tutuola's *The Palm Wine Drinkard* in Britain by Faber and Faber in 1952.⁴⁹ She explored archived correspondence between the author and his publishers in order to assess Faber's appreciation of the manuscript and the part that they played in shaping and presenting Tutuola's novel. Melissa Root has researched the archive of Heinemann Educational Books (HEB), with a view to exposing some of the difficulties encountered by this publisher in finding a viable market for the literature of Dambudzo Marechera.⁵⁰ Likewise, Nourdin Bejjit drew extensively upon correspondence lodged in the archive of HEB at the University of Reading to inform his study of the evolution of African literary production, and more specifically the history of the African Writers Series.⁵¹ Archival material relating to one of HEB's main publishing rivals in Africa, Oxford University Press (OUP), was the primary source of information for Caroline Davis's examination of the fortunes of OUP's Three Crowns Series from 1962 to 1976 (a commercial publishing venture that specialised in English-language African literature) within the context of shifting political and commercial agendas.⁵² A final example is Ruvani Ranasinha's recently published monograph on the subject of the publication and reception of South Asian Anglophone writing from the 1930s to the present.⁵³ This book is also based on original research in publishers' archives. It shows how changes to the literary marketplace affected subsequent generations of South Asian writers in Britain.

⁴⁹ See Gail Low, 'The Natural Artist: Publishing Amos Tutuola's *The Palm Wine Drinkard* in Postwar Britain', *Research in African Literatures*, 37, no. 4 (Winter 2006), pp. 15-33.

⁵⁰ Root presented some of this research at *The Colonial and Postcolonial Lives of the Book 1765-2005: Reaching the Margins* conference held in London 2005.

⁵¹ Nourdin Bejjit, 'The Publishing of African Literature: Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and the Heinemann African Writers Series 1962-1988' (unpublished PhD thesis, The Open University, 2008). Bejjit's interpretation of some of the archival material concerning Heinemann's publication of the African Writers Series supports the conclusions drawn in Chapter Three. These argue that developments *outside* of publishing influenced both *how* Heinemann published as well as *what* it published within the AWS, and that the impetus for the Series was simultaneously commercial, cultural and educational.

⁵² See Caroline Davis, 'The Politics of Postcolonial Publishing: Oxford University Press's Three Crowns Series 1962-1976', *Book History*, 8 (2005), pp. 227-244.

⁵³ See Ruvani Ranasinha, *South Asian Writers in Twentieth Century Britain - Culture in Transition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

In each of these examples, the intention clearly was to probe the reaction of publishers to events taking place both within and beyond the literary field. When considered together they point towards a burgeoning interest in the wider history of the colonial and postcolonial book. Sarah Brouillette is a recent scholar whose work has substantially contributed towards this emerging history. In 'Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace', Brouillette explores the material history of authorship, focussing specifically upon the publishing histories of well known, if not canonical, figures in the postcolonial literary field including Salman Rushdie, J.M. Coetzee and Zulfikar Ghose, and their readers.⁵⁴ This thesis brings another dimension to the history of the postcolonial book, and in so doing foregrounds the work of a number of writers who have yet to achieve the status of Rushdie *et al.* It introduces the field of black British literature to Book History through an examination of the interrelationships between literature, publishing and the wider economic, social, intellectual, political landscape.

In the field of Book History studies in the United States, there has been considerable academic interest in black publishing.⁵⁵ By contrast, there has been little book historical work that looks specifically at the publishing history of black British fiction in the UK, and which provides a chronological and holistic account of the manner in which this has developed during the second half of the twentieth century. Short descriptive entries that cover black book publishing and publishers have featured in two recently published reference books covering the black presence in British history and the black British community's contribution to culture. These are Alison Donnell's *Companion to Contemporary Black British Culture* and *The Oxford Companion to Black British*

⁵⁴ Sarah Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

⁵⁵ In his survey of book history scholarship, Jonathan Rose lists several publications since the beginning of the 1980s that cover African American and black presses in the USA as evidence that black publishing 'is now the most thoroughly documented of all the ethnic presses' (see Jonathan Rose, 'The History of Books: Revised and Enlarged', in *The Darnton debate: books and revolution in the eighteenth century*, ed. by Haydn T. Mason (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1998), pp. 83-104 (see Note 23, p. 89).

History.⁵⁶ Each entry foregrounds the role played by independent publishers in publishing books by and about black people in Britain. Elsewhere, Lyn Innes has gestured briefly to the role played by New Beacon Books and Bogle L'Ouverture, for example, in publishing material by, for and about black people in Britain in *A History of Black and Asian Writing in Britain*.⁵⁷

More generally, however, black British literature has been the subject of considerable critical attention since the late 1990s. There have been a plethora of anthologies, special issues of journals, essay collections and extended studies dedicated to this field; all signal the expansion of academic interest in this area, as well as in the fields of black British culture and history. The publication of some texts, like Onyekachi Wambu's *Empire Windrush: Fifty Years of Writing About Black Britain* and a special issue of *Kunapipi: Journal of Post-Colonial Writing* edited by David Dabydeen, entitled 'The Windrush Commemorative Issue', were timed to coincide with the fifty year anniversary of the docking in Britain of the SS Empire Windrush. Mike Phillips and Trevor Phillips also co-wrote *Windrush: The Irresistible Rise of Multi-racial Britain* to accompany a BBC television series that followed the fortunes of the Caribbean migrants. The Arts Council funded a timely anthology edited by Ferdinand Dennis and Naseem Khan entitled *Voices of the Crossing: The Impact of Britain on Writers from Asia, the Caribbean and Africa* in 2000. More recent publications on the black British contribution to literature include Lauri Ramey's 'Sea Change: Black British Writing' and James Procter's *Dwelling Places: Post-War Black British Writing*. These appeared alongside other key publications like Courttia Newland and Kadija Sesay's *IC3: The Penguin Book of New Black Writing in Britain*; Mark Stein's *Black British Literature: Novels of Transformation*; Kadija Sesay's, *Write Black, Write British: From Post Colonial to Black British Literature*; and Gail Low and

⁵⁶ Alison Donnell, *Companion to Contemporary Black British Culture* (London: Routledge, 2002, pp. 247-250), and *The Oxford Companion to Black British History* ed. David Dabydeen, John Gilmore and Cicely Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007; paperback edn., 2008), pp. 380-384.

⁵⁷ Lyn Innes, *A History of Black and Asian Writing in Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 235.

Marion Wynne-Davies's *A Black British Canon?*.⁵⁸ The number of recent publications in this area, aimed at both academic and more general readerships, emphasizes the fact that the black British presence is, more than ever before, considered an integral part of British history and modern society. This thesis elaborates upon how this position was achieved; it goes on to contend that, whilst the black British presence in literature and society may be considered permanent, the nomenclature used to refer to this particular group may well be short-lived.

Despite its seemingly prolific use to date, the label 'black British' requires some clarification due to the fact that it has provoked considerable debate from within the literary and academic community. Many writers have resisted the label 'black British', arguing that it can create an artificial barrier which is often difficult to break down. Fred D'Aguiar, a writer of Guyanese heritage who was born in Britain but spent his early years in Guyana before returning to England at the age of twelve, considers the label 'black British' to be extraneous.⁵⁹ In fact he has denounced all labels, arguing that his origins are of no interest, preferring to be described simply as a writer. In 1989 he expressed incredulity over the label 'black British' to describe any play, poem, novel or short story. He was convinced that an author's individual creativity should prevail over his/her racial characteristics.⁶⁰ In D'Aguiar's view, prefixing generations of writers with 'black',

⁵⁸ Onyekachi Wambu, *Empire Windrush: Fifty Years of Writing About Black Britain* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1998); Mike Phillips and Trevor Phillips, *Windrush: The Irresistible Rise of Multi-racial Britain* (London: HarperCollins, 1998); Ferdinand Dennis and Naseem Khan, *Voices of the Crossing: The Impact of Britain on Writers from Asia, the Caribbean and Africa* (London: The Arts Council, 2000); R Victoria Arana and Lauri Ramey, 'Sea Change: Black British Writing', *BMa: The Sonia Sanchez Review*, 6, no. 2 (Spring 2001); James Procter, *Dwelling Places: Post-War Black British Writing* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003); Courttia Newland and Kadija Sesay, *IC3: The Penguin Book of New Black Writing in Britain* (London: Penguin Books, 2001); Mark Stein, *Black British Literature: Novels of Transformation* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2004); Kadija Sesay, *Write Black, Write British: From Post Colonial to Black British Literature* (Hertford: Hansib, 2005); and Gail Low and Marion Wynne-Davies, *A Black British Canon?* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

⁵⁹ D'Aguiar clearly refuses to be confined by the label 'black British' and is wary of being tagged as an author of the black experience. His fiction reflects this. His novels are set all over the world, in the Caribbean, America and Britain, and look back in time. His first novel *The Longest Memory* (1994) was about a slave on an eighteenth-century Virginia plantation. It was followed by *Dear Future* (1996), set on a fictional Caribbean island, and *Feeding the Ghosts* (1997) and by *Bethany Bettany* (2003). All of his novels were published by Chatto and Windus, an imprint of Random House publishers.

⁶⁰ Fred D'Aguiar, 'Against Black British Literature', in *Tibisiri: Caribbean writers and critics*, ed. by M. Butcher, pp. 106-114.

whether as adjective or noun, was not only derogatory, but a futile exercise since the ‘creative imagination knows no boundaries’.⁶¹ D’Aguiar’s comments resonate with remarks made by Salman Rushdie with reference to Commonwealth Literature. In his provocative 1983 essay, ‘Commonwealth Literature Does Not Exist’, Rushdie protested against the ghettoisation of writers within this category. The effect, he said, was to ‘change the meaning of the far broader term “English literature” [which he had] always taken to mean simply the literature of the English language [...] into something far narrower, something topographical, nationalistic, possibly even racially segregationist’, and to place unnecessary emphasis upon an author’s nationality.⁶² For Rushdie, this particular act of labelling was unnaturally restrictive, as well as demeaning and irrelevant. However, as Kadija Sesay, who describes herself as African British, also reminds us, labelling can have its strategic benefits. Many writers will ‘(happily) be referred to as Black British, particularly if they can benefit from what is often seen as a new catch-all sexy terminology’.⁶³

Debate concerning the labelling of writers and writing continues to rage. An example of the dangers of using the label ‘black British’ in relation to literature was highlighted at the start of this research by the author, memoirist, editor and publisher, Diana Athill. In a letter written in response to a request that she might share some insights into her publication of black writers in Britain during the 1950s and early 1960s, she wrote emphatically that:

I have to say that I personally dislike the term ‘black British books’. I suppose it is justified if you are approaching the subject from the point of view of a study of racism, but from the literary point of view, then a book is a book and a writer is a writer, and to hell with black or white.⁶⁴

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

⁶² Salman Rushdie, “‘Commonwealth Literature’ Does Not Exist”, in *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991*, ed. by Salman Rushdie (London: Granta Books, 1992), pp. 61-70 (p. 63).

⁶³ Kadija Sesay, *Write Black, Write British*, p. 16.

⁶⁴ Diana Athill to Philippa Ireland, 4 May 2006 (personal communication).

Diana Athill is a former editor at Andre Deutsch and publisher of V.S Naipaul and Michael Anthony. Her denunciation of the label 'black British' is interesting as it reinforces the common response made by publishers when confronted with the question as to *why* a particular text was selected for publication. Publishers often appear reluctant to attribute their decision-making process to any other reason than that a text is considered to be good enough. This is in direct opposition to Adams and Barker's assertion that the creation of a book has little to do with the nature of the text. It is the aim of this thesis to provide reasons for the publication of black British fiction other than, or perhaps in addition to, the text itself, and without entering into a separate debate about its literary quality.

To return to Athill's comment above, mine is not intended to be a study of black British literature in terms of issues of cultural identity, race or racism.⁶⁵ But can the racial connotations of the term 'black' ever be completely ignored? In order to answer this, a brief résumé of the history of the use of the label 'black' to refer to non-white people in the UK since the 1970s is required.

The label 'black' emerged as a political signifier in the late 1960s. The timing of this is significant, as James Procter explained in *Writing Black Britain* (2000). The political category 'black', he writes, came about 'at a historically specific moment in Britain, demarcating a united front against what was becoming an increasingly explicit racialised white national community'.⁶⁶ In the 1970s 'black' was assumed as a general umbrella term by people of African, Caribbean and Asian descent in Britain in order to articulate their alliance against racism. This was an overtly political act, which came out of mounting opposition to racial prejudice, discrimination and violence. It was also, according to cultural critic, Kobena Mercer, a defining moment: 'the rearticulation of black as a political rather than a racial category among Asian, Caribbean and African peoples, originating from a variety of ethnic backgrounds and sharing the common experiences of

⁶⁵ For such a study see David Gunning, 'Anti-Racism, the Nation-State and Contemporary Black British Literature', *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 39 (2004), pp. 29-43, and Gunning's later 'Articulating Race and Anti-Racism in Black Writing in Britain' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Leeds, 2005).

⁶⁶ James Procter, *Writing Black Britain, 1948-1998: An Interdisciplinary Anthology* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 5.

British racism [...] created a new form of symbolic unity out of the signifiers of racial difference'.⁶⁷

Issues of race and racism were not new phenomena in post-war Britain, but as mass migration to Britain increased after 1948 so too did racial tensions. Housing was in short supply following wartime bombing. This shortage – combined with the colour-bar – led to some of the first clashes with the established white community.⁶⁸ Conflict between the white and black communities continued and worsened, with race riots erupting in several of Britain's major cities in 1958. Racial tensions were ignited further in London the following year after the death of Kelso Cochrane, an Antiguan immigrant to London who was murdered at the hands of white youths. There were further riots at the Notting Hill Carnival in 1976. More rioting took place in Brixton and in Toxteth in Liverpool in the early 1980s. In 1981 a fire in New Cross killed thirteen young black people at a birthday party in South East London. It was suspected that the cause of the fire was racially-motivated arson. Protests arose out of a perceived indifference on the part of the white community and the police force to its cause, and mobilised black political activity. These built upon earlier demonstrations of collective resistance, like the *West Indian Standing Conference* (1958) and Black Power marches of 1969 and 1971, and were propelled by visits to Britain by influential and charismatic radicals including Malcolm X (1965) and Bob Marley (1975).

The period of racial upheaval that took place from the late 1950s to the early 1980s was fuelled by comments made by right-wing politicians. In 1968, Conservative MP Enoch Powell made his infamous 'rivers of blood' speech in which he quoted from Virgil's *Aeneid* in his prediction of dire consequences for the current policy on immigration: 'As I look ahead, I am filled with foreboding. Like the Roman, I seem to see the River Tiber foaming with much blood'. Reaction to Powell's comments was polarised. Its tone provoked considerable outrage, yet thousands of workers at dockyards and

⁶⁷ Kobena Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 271.

⁶⁸ The 'colour-bar' is a term used to refer to racial segregation and discrimination in relation to jobs, housing, education leisure and the provision of goods and services.

steelworks across the country staged strikes and marches in support of his views.⁶⁹

Margaret Thatcher, leader of the opposition Conservative Party from 1975 to 1979 and Prime Minister of Britain from 1979 to 1990, similarly adopted a tough stance on immigration. Her approach was perhaps epitomised by remarks she made in 1978 that indigenous people in Britain may feel 'swamped' by people with different cultures.⁷⁰

An alliance between Africans, Asians and Caribbeans in Britain remained in place for the best part of two decades. However, by the late 1980s calls were being made for recognition of the diversity in experience of black people in Britain. In 1988, Stuart Hall, the eminent cultural theorist, sociologist, writer, film critic and political activist, proposed in a now famous essay, 'New Ethnicities',⁷¹ that the time had come to recognise

the extraordinary diversity of subject positions, social experiences and cultural identities which compose the category 'black'; that is, the recognition that 'black' is essentially a politically and culturally constructed category, which cannot be grounded in a set of fixed transcultural or transcendental racial categories and which therefore has no guarantees in Nature.⁷²

Hall was part of the community of black writers and intellectuals who came to Britain in the 1940s, '50s and '60s. He founded the *New Left Review* in 1960 and contributed towards opening up the debate about immigration and identity, and expanding the scope of cultural studies to deal with race and gender.⁷³

⁶⁹ See 1968: *Powell slates immigration policy*, BBC. Available: http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/april/20/newsid_2489000/2489357.stm [5 December 2009].

⁷⁰ The transcript of the interview in which Margaret Thatcher made these comments can be read at *TV Interview for Granada World in Action* ("rather swamped"), 1978, Margaret Thatcher Foundation. Available: <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/speeches/displaydocument.asp?docid=103485> [5 December 2009].

⁷¹ Stuart Hall, 'New Ethnicities (1988)', in *Writing Black Britain: 1948-1998*, ed. by James Procter, pp. 265-275. This has become a seminal text for historians of black Britain.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 268.

⁷³ Tim Adams, 'People: Stuart Hall: The Interview', *The Observer*, 23 September 2007, Review, p. 8.

Hall was arguing for acknowledgment of heterogeneity in experience of black people in Britain, and for an end to the notion of an essential black subject – a singular black experience – that emerged during struggles over representation in British culture and society. Hall wanted it to be acknowledged that all black people in Britain were in fact *not* the same. From this point, rather than referencing a homogeneous community of non-white people in Britain united by the common experience of racism and marginalisation, emphasis was laid upon the culturally diverse nature of the category ‘black’, both by academics and society at large.

Previously, Hall had summed up the disillusionment felt by second generation black Britons. He described how, in 1970s Britain, ‘black people are oppressed, are “suffering”; [it is] the land that they are in but not of, the country of estrangement, dispossession and brutality’.⁷⁴ His use of the preposition ‘of’ in place of ‘in’ lays bare the difference between different generations of blacks in Britain. First generation, post-war migrants were *in* Britain through choice. In contrast, second and third generations of black Britons were born and raised in this country. They were *of* Britain. These are the generations who might also be described as black *and* British, and thus labelled as ‘black British’.

Despite its rejection by some writers and publishers, use of the label ‘black British’ has become increasingly commonplace. Applied contemporaneously and in retrospect, other writers, editors, literary activists and scholars have made expedient use of this label to describe the literature of black writers in Britain. One of the first definitions of ‘black British’ to be used in a literary context was put forward by the writer, lecturer and broadcaster, Prabhu Gupta in 1986. His definition included a diverse mix of writers with African, Caribbean and Asian backgrounds dating as far back as the eighteenth century. Thus, in *Black British Literature: An Annotated Bibliography* (1986), Gupta identified black Britons as:

⁷⁴ Stuart Hall and others, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, The State, and Law and Order* (London: Macmillan Press, 1978), p. 357.

those people of non-European origin who are now, or were in the past, entitled to hold a British passport and displayed a substantial commitment to Britain, for example by living a large part of their lives here.⁷⁵

Guptara's bibliography was sponsored by the Great London Council. It was published as part of an initiative aimed at providing a record of both the historical and contemporary contributions made by black artists to British society. Accordingly, his list of black British texts included any text that 'might be of any conceivable interest from a black British point of view' written by 'older black – African, Asian and Caribbean [who] could write about their experiences in Britain [and] younger black writers who have no experiences to draw on other than British ones'.⁷⁶ His bibliography ranges in scope from anthologies, to drama, poetry and fiction, to academic prose, reading guides published by The Association for Teachers of Caribbean and African Literature (ATCAL) and literary criticism.⁷⁷ It includes authors of books for children and young adults, like Faustin Charles (*Anancy's Day of Cricket* (1986)) and Farrukh Dohndy (*Trip Trap* (1982));⁷⁸ the creative writing of young black Britons, David Simon and Norman Smith; the autobiographical *To Sir, With Love* by E.R. Braithwaite (1959);⁷⁹ the literature of the Windrush generation of writers, and earlier, including C.L.R James (*The Black Jacobins*, first published in 1938) and Sam Selvon, V.S. Naipaul, George Lamming and Andrew Salkey, as well as other Caribbean and African writers in Britain in the 1950s and 1960s, such as Wilson Harris and Buchi Emecheta;⁸⁰ the work of Asian writers in Britain in the 1950s and after, such as Attia Hosain; and Salman Rushdie's early fiction. It also includes some books by white authors with black characters in them, like the white American writer Judy Blume's *Iggie's House* (1981).⁸¹

⁷⁵ Prabhu Gupta, *Black British Literature: An Annotated Bibliography* (Sydney and Coventry: Dangaroo Press, 1986), p. 14.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 10, 19.

⁷⁷ The Association for Teachers of Caribbean and African Literature (ATCAL) was founded in 1978 as an association for all those concerned with African and Caribbean literature in Britain.

⁷⁸ Farrukh Dohndy, *Trip Trap* (London: Gollancz, 1982); Faustin Charles, *Anancy's Day of Cricket* (London: Arawidi, 1986).

⁷⁹ E.R. Braithwaite, *To Sir, With Love* (London: Bodley Head, 1959).

⁸⁰ C.L.R James, *Black Jacobins* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1938).

⁸¹ Judy Blume, *Iggie's House* (London: Heinemann, 1981).

In contrast to Guptara's very broad definition of black British literature, David Dabydeen and Nana Wilson-Tagoe, the authors of *A Reader's Guide to West Indian and Black British Literature* (1988), proposed a more limited definition, one that excluded writers of Asian origin.⁸² Citing practical constraints, but at the same time perhaps hinting at the simultaneous fracturing of the political alliance between Asians, Africans and Caribbeans, Dabydeen and Wilson-Tagoe restricted their study to writers of West Indian parentage. For the purpose of their guide, the authors considered black British literature to be that which was 'created and published in Britain, largely for a British audience, by black writers either born in Britain or who spent a major portion of their lives in Britain'.⁸³ This definition clearly followed the conception of Black Art prevalent at the time, i.e. that which is produced by black people, largely and specifically for a black audience, and which in terms of content addresses the black experience.

The process of constructing a definition of black British has proved time and again to be problematic. Some of the recent critical discourse on black cultural production in Britain, like Kwesi Owusu's *Black British Culture and Society* (2000) and James Procter's *Writing Black Britain* (2000), has sought to situate black British writing within its wider historical context. This is an exercise that inevitably takes into account the politicisation of the label 'black' by way of an examination of its metamorphosis from racial category to aesthetic signifier.⁸⁴ Taking this approach resulted in Procter adopting a definition of black British literature in *Writing Black Britain* that consciously privileged 'black' as a political signifier. His definition draws upon the alliance of non-whites in Britain during the 1970s and 1980s that was based on political similarities. As such, it is an extensive definition that encompasses Caribbean, African and South Asian experience in Britain after the Second World War. Whereas Procter's use of the label black British, like Guptara's, is wide-

⁸² David Dabydeen and Nana Wilson-Tagoe, *A Reader's Guide to West Indian and Black British Literature* (London: Hansib/Rutherford Press, 1988).

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁸⁴ Kwesi Owusu, *Black British Culture and Society* (London: Routledge, 2000); Procter, *Writing Black Britain*.

ranging, elsewhere the focus has been solely upon second and third generations of black Britons.

In 2001, *IC3: The Penguin Book of New Black Writing in Britain* was published.⁸⁵ It was commissioned by Hamish Hamilton (an imprint of Penguin Books) and intended to be a sweeping, landmark collection that was accessible to a widespread and mainstream audience. In a controversial move, and one that consciously shied away from using 'black' in the political sense, its editors adopted the label 'IC3' to define the group of second and third generation British-born black writers of Afro-Caribbean descent in Britain who contributed towards the book. IC3 is the police identity code for black people. Their use of this definition provoked scathing criticism from the journalist, editor and producer Onyekachi Wambu. Wambu accused the book's editors, Courttia Newland and Kadija Sesay, of succumbing to 'that black British disease of always searching for the low ground, spending valuable energy trying to turn others' dubious definitions into a positive identity'.⁸⁶ With their use of the label 'IC3', Newland and Sesay revived a very public debate amongst literary critics, writers and journalists about the labelling of black British writers and writing in the twenty-first century.

The term 'black British' continues to be open to all manner of criticism. This includes arguments that it can have the effect of constraining and trivialising the work of black writers in Britain, that it is too politically-defined, that it focuses too much on the black experience alone, and that it can have a negative effect upon readers' perceptions. In particular, Mathlere-Tsigé Getachew questions whether traditional definitions of black literature along the lines of Black Art, as discussed above, have prevented its wider recognition.⁸⁷ Koye Oyedeji has challenged its validity on the basis that the *only*

⁸⁵ *IC3: The Penguin Book of New Black Writing in Britain*, ed. by Courttia Newland, and Kadija Sesay (London: Penguin, 2001).

⁸⁶ Onyekachi Wambu, 'Think it, so we might do it', *The Independent*, 24 June 2000, Features, p. 10.

⁸⁷ Mahlete-Tsigé Getachew, 'Marginalia: Black Literature and the Problem of Recognition', in *Write Black, Write British*, pp. 323-345.

commonality between modern (black British) writers is that they are writers.⁸⁸ This particular argument, however, is not new in that it calls to mind Fred D'Aguiar's previous dismissal of 'black British literature'.

These various approaches to the definition of 'black British' are presented here to highlight some of the many issues that other academics working specifically within a literary context have previously encountered, especially when trying to label specific groups of writers and writing. It is clear from this relatively small selection that, since the first definitions were put forward in the mid-1980s, the notion of 'black British' has narrowed in scope. The tendency has clearly been to move away from designating all writers of 'non European origin' as 'black', to including only those with an Afro-Caribbean ancestry within umbrella 'black British'. This Afro-Caribbean trajectory reflected changes taking place within the wider society. These were summed up by Stuart Hall in a talk entitled 'Frontlines and Backyards' in 1997, which he opened by emphasising that

I am largely speaking about the trajectory of an Afro-Caribbean identity in Britain. [...] One of the key differences is that had I been speaking to you a decade ago I would not have entered this caveat. Afro-Caribbeans and Asians were treated by the dominant society as so much alike that they could be subsumed and mobilized under a single political category. But today that is no longer the case.⁸⁹

A specific instance of Hall's observations about the breaking up of the alliance between Africans, Caribbeans and Asians can be found by examining a key moment in the history of the Asian Women Writers' Collective, a publishing organisation which began life in 1984 as the Asian Women Writers' Workshop. This was a community based organisation that provided women writers with a valuable support network through which

⁸⁸ Koye Oyediji, 'Prelude to a Brand New Purchase on Black Political Identity: A Reading of Bernadine Evaristo's *Lara* and Diran Adebayo's *Some Kind of Black*', in *Write Black, Write British*, pp. 346-374.

⁸⁹ Stuart Hall, 'Frontlines and Backyards', in *Black British Culture and Society*, ed. by Kwesi Owusu (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 127-129 (p. 127).

critical issues could be addressed. The transition from workshop to collective generated considerable debate over the group's name. And it was the concern about identification and labelling that is particularly revealing. According to Asha Sen:

Some members were in favour of calling themselves 'black' to show their solidarity with Afro-Caribbean women, while others felt discriminated against by certain dominant Afro-Caribbean women's groups. Another set felt that there were too many cultural differences between Asian and Afro-Caribbean writing to make it possible for the groups to respond critically to each other. The title 'Asian Women Writers' Collective (AWWC) was finally agreed upon on the grounds that there had hitherto been no forum for Asian women to express themselves. It was decided that the collective would work closely with black women's groups and participate in events for black women writers.⁹⁰

The primary focus of the Collective's activities was to facilitate the publication of literature by Asian women. For this reason, a history of the Collective does not appear in Chapter Eight of this thesis, which considers the role of feminist publishing houses in the development of black British fiction publication. It is worth noting however, that this Collective was active on the publishing scene at the same time as Sheba and Black Women Talk, who are discussed in more detail in this chapter. It is interesting to note that clearly, for some other members of the Collective at least, the term 'black' continued to represent a body of African, Asian and Caribbean people in Britain, united by the experience of racism and discrimination. Sen's account also lays bare, however, some of the fractures emerging within the black community by the mid- to late-1980s, when calls were being made for the recognition of heterogeneity. Furthermore, in July 1992 the Collective redefined the word 'Asian' to include women originating from countries beyond South Asia, including China, Japan and Turkey.⁹¹ Thus, this Collective intended to widen rather than narrow its remit in order to increase the visibility of other marginalised groups,

⁹⁰ In Donnell, *Companion to Contemporary Black British Culture*, p. 20.

⁹¹ *Record Description: Right of Way*, VADS: the online resource for visual arts, Available: <http://vads.bath.ac.uk/flarge.php?uid=47321&sos=0> [14 November 2010].

adapting its terms of reference to both reflect and embrace the increasingly diverse nature of modern British society.

Such shifts in the cultural interpretation of the term ‘black’ when used as a prefix to ‘British’ are replicated in the structure of this thesis. Part One provides the contextual background necessary to set the scene for the subsequent examination of the publication of black British fiction. Part Two considers more recent history still, focussing on a set of novelists who were writing and being published from the early 1980s onwards, and who share a common black British perspective.

The thesis, therefore, takes a chronological approach, moving from the 1950s to the 2000s. Several writers mentioned in the first five chapters do not fit **neatly** in with the definition of ‘black British’ that is used in the thesis. This is a consequence of the fact that many of these are writers from a previous generation, whose affiliations are to other countries, in the Caribbean, Africa and Asia; they are also pioneering figures whose experience differed in some respects from those of the later generation of black Britons of Afro-Caribbean heritage that were born here. They are writers who held British passports and were black *in* Britain, as opposed to a later generation of writers who were both black *and* British by birth. Yet, their presence in this discussion is important. It is only really possible to understand how material is selected for publication by looking at history of the factors that influenced earlier publishers’ decisions. Here, this involves taking into account elements of the experience of black writers and the black community in Britain between the 1950s and the 1970s. There is, unavoidably, a certain degree of slippage around the definition ‘black British’ throughout. This does not detract from any of the arguments put forward; rather it can be seen as evidence of just how problematic the process of labelling writers and writing is, and continues to be.

As the discussion above has shown, the notion of ‘black British’ is rarely used with any consistency and has a complex genealogy. In Chapter Nine, a selection of book reviews are discussed to give a flavour of the reaction of the reviewing media to the work of two contemporary black British writers, Diran Adebayo and Andrea Levy. In 2006 Gail Low and Gail Wynne-Davies edited a collection of essays entitled *A Black British Canon?*

Contributors to this collection ranged from doctoral candidates to eminent scholars whose work incorporates current debates about canonicity, a complex issue which is also touched upon at various times throughout this thesis. Low and Wynne-Davies' use of a question mark following the assertive title is clearly deliberate and highly significant. It suggests that the term 'black British' remains one of controversy and challenge. In contrast, four years later, in the opening of a 2010 review of Andrea Levy's most recent novel, *The Long Song*,⁹² Levy is described as 'one of the UK's most popular black writers [...] creating a body of work that explores and communicates the Black British experience to a mass audience'.⁹³ The implication here is that the concept 'black British' lives on, continuing to be used in a more expansive and less controversial manner outside academic circles, and maintaining a very real presence in the public imagination.

Clearly, there are innumerable difficulties associated with constructing a sound definition of black British. Here, the definition of black British used throughout takes into account a very particular set of circumstances. It is based on one that was put forward by Kadija Sesay in *Write Black, Write British* (2005) where she described black British writers as those

born in Britain, educated in Britain and because of their heritage and parentage, their 'take' on Britain is viewed through different glasses from those born elsewhere, and possibly raised and/or educated here.⁹⁴

She adds that, 'it is not always because they want it that way, but because they are forced into it'. Sesay therefore makes clear the lack of choice available to those black British writers who are compelled to live in Britain, unlike the black Britons of Guptara's definition that chose 'to show a substantial commitment to Britain'. The definition used in this thesis incorporates a body of work authored by black Britons who were born and/or were raised here between the 1970s and 1990s. It is further characterised by the experience of being simultaneously black *and* British.

⁹² Andrea Levy, *The Long Song* (London: Headline, 2010).

⁹³ Andrea Stuart, 'The Long Song', *The Independent*, 5 February 2010.

⁹⁴ Sesay, *Write Black, Write British*, p. 16.

In a sense, my use of this definition dictates the period of time covered by this thesis. Its main focus is the *children* of first generation black settlers in Britain after World War Two. These children were not writing or publishing fiction until at least the 1970s, and in many cases, much later still, simply because they were not old enough to do so. As Margaret Busby made clear during an interview in 2006,

If you think about the 1960s, there were not many black writers who were born here and being published here. You had writers from Africa or the Caribbean who lived here and settled here, but you wouldn't call them black British. There wasn't such a thing.⁹⁵

This reasoning is quite straight forward. Yet a reminder of the problems – and benefits – attached to the practice of grouping ‘generations’ of writers according to their age, or by the date of their parents’ or grandparents’ arrival in their country of residence, is usefully provided by Mark Stein.⁹⁶ Stein does not altogether reject the idea of differentiating groups of authors by age. He does, however, propose taking into consideration other affinities between authors as well as the effect of outside influences – political, cultural and social – upon individual writers. This thesis acknowledges that the boundaries between ‘generations’ of writers can be blurred, and that writers rarely fit neatly into a single taxonomy, however it is defined. By extension, the time frame covered by this thesis is deliberately ambiguous. It begins in the 1950s – a generation before the label black British was first employed in a literary sense, and well before many of the writers considered in later chapters were even born. It is also essential, however, that the scene is set for the publication of black British fiction from the mid-1980s to the present day. Part One covers the period from the 1950s to the 1990s, opening with a survey of some of the ‘Windrush’ generation of writers from the Caribbean, who were published in Britain in the 1950s and 1960s; Part Two then moves forward chronologically and focuses on the period from the mid 1980s onwards.

⁹⁵ Philippa Ireland, ‘Conversation with Margaret Busby’, recorded 25 May 2006. See Appendix 1, below, pp. 225-231.

⁹⁶ Mark Stein, *Black British Literature: Novels of Transformation* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2004), pp. 5-6.

Part One – Contexts

Chapter One

PRECURSORS AND INFLUENCES

Post-war publication of black writers in Britain

For a time during the fifties and early sixties it was probably easier for a black writer to get his book accepted by a London publisher, and kindly reviewed thereafter, than it was for a young white person.¹

The historical fact is that the 'emergence' of a dozen or so novelists in the British Caribbean with some fifty books to their credit or disgrace, and all published between 1948 and 1958, is in the nature of a phenomenon.²

It is often argued that June 1948 is a defining moment in the history of the black presence in Britain. It marks the docking of the SS Empire Windrush in Tilbury, the ship which brought some 500 passengers from the West Indies to England. The arrival of these few hundred migrants has come to represent the beginning of a mass economic migration from the Caribbean and other colonies that subsequently effected a historic change upon British society.

Amongst the early migrants were a number of writers from the Caribbean. In 1950, George Lamming from Barbados and Sam Selvon, a Trinidadian, arrived in England having travelled to Britain independently aboard the same ship. Poets John Figueroa (Jamaica) and James Berry (Jamaica) had arrived in England slightly earlier, in 1946 and 1948 respectively. The novelist Edgar Mittelholzer (Guyana) first arrived in 1948. At

¹ Diana Athill, *Stet* (London: Granta Publications, 2000), p. 103.

² George Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile* (London: Michael Joseph, 1960; repr. London: Pluto Books, 2005), p. 29.

various times during the 1950s, V.S. Naipaul (Trinidad), Edward Kamau Brathwaite (Barbados), Andrew Salkey (Jamaica) and Wilson Harris (Guyana) also arrived in Britain. Some came seeking literary careers, others came as students. Together they went on to form a distinct group of writers in Britain from the West Indies who made names for themselves in the 1950s and 1960s. Migrants from other of Britain's colonies, who went on to become prominent writers of the diaspora in Britain also arrived around the same time. For example, from India, Attia Hosain travelled to Britain with her husband in 1947 and Kamala Markandaya moved to London in 1948.

It is wrong to assume from this list that black and Asian writers suddenly appeared in Britain after World War Two. During the 1930s and 1940s, for instance, books written by a number of notable black and Asian authors living in Britain were published by the likes of Secker and Warburg, Aldor, and the Fortune Press in the UK. This included work by the Trinidadian C.L.R. James; Una Marson, poet, activist and playwright from Jamaica who first conceived the idea for the BBC radio programme, 'Caribbean Voices'; G.V. Desani, author of *All About H. Hatterr* (1948), born in Kenya to Indian parents; and the poet and editor of *Poetry London* (1939-1951), Thurairajah Tambimuttu, from Sri Lanka. In fact, the history of black and Asian writers and writing in Britain dates back to the eighteenth century, and has been well documented by other scholars, such as Lyn Innes.³

Nevertheless, it is significant that it was in post-war London that a number of writers from various islands in the Caribbean – who would not necessarily have made contact with each other had they remained in the West Indies – met. At the time, budding writers in the Caribbean were isolated. They had few opportunities for communication with one another, or for publication. The reason for this was that the necessary publishing structures were not yet available locally. The only outlets available for publication were small literary journals, like *BIM* (Barbados), *Kyk-Over-Al* (Guyana) and *Focus* (Jamaica).⁴ For anyone seriously

³ C.L. Innes, *A History of Black and Asian Writing in Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

⁴ Philip Nanton, 'London Calling', *Caribbean Beat*, no. 63 (September/October 2003).

intending to establish him/herself as a writer, London, as the metropolitan hub of British publishing, and by extension, the Commonwealth, was the place to be.

As the former Caribbean Publisher for Longman and specialist in Caribbean literature, Anne Walmsley, explains in her important narrative history of the Caribbean Artists Movement 1966-1972: 'would-be writers arriving in Britain from the Caribbean in the 1950s found a range of [literary and cultural] opportunities and encouragement open to them, especially if they lived in London'.⁵ Gail Low similarly portrays London as 'a special place for Caribbean writers in the 'fifties and 'sixties'.⁶ The significance of this location for post-war Caribbean writers in Britain cannot be underestimated. It was to Britain that a group of students, intellectuals and writers, many of whom were to become key figures in Caribbean literature, gravitated towards as a result of a natural cultural and historical affinity with the mother country, and the opportunities that her capital offered. It was here that their combined voices were first heard most clearly.

The timing of this convergence is also significant since it coincided with an expansion in British publishing after the Second World War. As Anne Walmsley describes, 'book publishing was experiencing something of a postwar boom; small, young publishing houses were eager to bring out work by fresh, vigorous new voices from the far corners of the Commonwealth'.⁷ This was clearly an advantage for many of the Caribbean writers who established themselves in Britain at this time, and who subsequently found themselves welcomed into the domestic literary scene.

Indeed, over the course of the 1950s and 1960s several small, independent family-run businesses were responsible for publishing the early work of a number of Caribbean, African and Indian writers, resident in both Britain and abroad, many of whom went on to achieve literary prominence and standing. Bruce King notes three specific examples as

⁵ Anne Walmsley, *The Caribbean Artists Movement 1966-1972* (London: New Beacon Books, 1992), p. 11.

⁶ Gail Low, "'Finding the Centre?'" Publishing Commonwealth Writing in London: The Case of Anglophone Caribbean Writing 1950-65', *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 37, no. 2 (2002), pp. 21-38 (p. 28).

⁷ Walmsley, *The Caribbean Artists Movement 1966-1972*, p. 11.

being particularly welcoming to new, international writers in the 1950s and 1960s: Michael Joseph, Andre Deutsch and Faber.⁸ Michael Joseph was the first to publish George Lamming and Sudhindra Nath Ghose; Andre Deutsch published V.S. Naipaul, Michael Anthony and Wole Soyinka; and Faber & Faber were the publishers of most of Wilson Harris and Amos Tutuola's oeuvres. They also published work by the South African writers, Ezekiel Mphahlele and Peter Abrahams.

One can add here the publishing houses of Allan Wingate (Sam Selvon), MacGibbon and Kee (also Sam Selvon), Chatto & Windus (Attia Hosain and Aubrey Menen), Jonathan Cape (Roger Mais), New English Library (Edgar Mittelholzer) and Hogarth Press (also Edgar Mittelholzer). This roll of British publishers – clearly enthusiastic about some of the literature emanating from across Britain's declining empire – is by no means comprehensive.⁹ Other writers of note came to Britain from the Caribbean and elsewhere during the 1950s and 1960s, and *later* had their work published here. E.A. Markham (Montserrat) and Roy Heath (British Guiana), for example, both had work published in Britain from the 1970s onwards.

Nevertheless, the breadth of this list *does* indicate a definite interest in the publication of writers from the Commonwealth on the part of British publishers. It also reinforces the fact that around the middle of the twentieth century London was to become the capital of publishing from the Caribbean specifically. In addition, it suggests that there is at least an element of truth in Athill's clearly very personal, rather provocative and so far unsubstantiated claim about the ease by which black writers could get a manuscript published. Despite the fact that they are clearly anecdotal, Athill's comments do beg the question as to *why* British publishers were so keen to publish new voices from Africa, the Caribbean and India. Can their motivation be attributed to any reason other than that

⁸ Bruce King, *The Internationalization of English Literature*, The Oxford English Literary History, Volume 13: 1948-2000 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 323.

⁹ There has been scholarly interest in the publication of South Asian literature in Britain specifically, as well as the general publication of writers from the Commonwealth in post-war Britain. See Ruvani Ranasinha, *South Asian Writers in Twentieth Century Britain: Culture in Transition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), and Gail Low, "'Finding the Centre?'" Publishing Commonwealth Writing in London: The Case of Anglophone Caribbean Writing 1950-65', for example.

specific example of literature from these regions merited publication purely on the basis of literary quality? When asked to elaborate upon her remarks about the publication of black writers in the 1950s and 1960s, Diana Athill wrote that

naturally the sudden expanding of the horizon after the war ended, when ‘our colonies’ abruptly became independent nations, was exciting [...]; and the scattering of West Indian and African and Indian writers which resulted from it attracted lively attention – which explains ‘for a time in the fifties etc.’ Those writers drew attention for reasons which were historical rather than literary.¹⁰

Although she did go on to stress that these were writers of what she calls ‘quality’ literature, her admission that there were other ‘historical’ reasons which contributed to publishers’ decisions to publish West Indian, African and Indian writers is worthy of further investigation.

In her publishing memoir, *Stet* (2000), Athill describes the literary and political interest shown by some British publishers in writers from [ex-]colonial countries. She partly attributes the motivation for this interest to a liberal persuasion that generated feelings of guilt associated with the trappings of empire and colonialism. At the same time she concedes that ‘there was [...] something else at work as well as literary and/or political interest’.¹¹ This other factor was commercial, being the potential for profit offered by the expanding local markets for books in Africa, India and the Caribbean. This prompted some British publishers like Andre Deutsch, and educational publishers such as Longman, Heinemann and OUP, to embark upon local publishing ventures: ‘to get in on the ground floor of publishing for and about Africa’ (and, it can be added, the Caribbean).¹²

It appears, therefore, that multiple incentives informed the choices of British publishers in relation to black writing at this time. Moreover, in the 1950s and 1960s

¹⁰ Diana Athill to Philippa Ireland, 4 May 2006 (private correspondence).

¹¹ Athill, *Stet*, p. 103.

¹² *Ibid.*

independent publishers were in a better position to take risks on new and unproven authors than many of the more modern publishers currently are. This commercial risk-taking has been attributed in part to the safety-net provided by public libraries who were often a publisher's most important customer.¹³ With this in mind, the role of the library in the development of black British fiction in subsequent decades will be considered in Chapter Four. To return to the preceding period however, Gail Low has characterised the immediate post-war decades as an era of optimism and idealism for independent publishers.¹⁴ It was also a period when publishers could see the potential for capital gains that might be made by developing new lists made up of Anglophone writing from across the world.

Athill's comments above concern the publication of black writers from Africa, the Caribbean and India. In the second opening epigraph, George Lamming was describing a particular cluster of West Indian immigrant writers as a significant 'phenomenon'. In the remainder of this chapter, attention will primarily focus on some of those Caribbean writers domiciled in Britain during the 1950s and 1960s referred to by Lamming, and now commonly referred to as writers of the Windrush generation. It has become common practice to consider this Windrush 'generation' of writers as directly preceding later generations of 'black British' writers, as explained previously.¹⁵ Many of the writers of this earlier 'generation', who were successfully published during the 1950s and 1960s, often returned to the West Indies or moved elsewhere. In terms of the definition used in this thesis, they are not then 'black British'. Some, however, like George Lamming, Sam Selvon and V.S. Naipaul, made an indelible mark on British literature and were an inspiration for subsequent generations of novelists who followed on.

¹³ Low, "Finding the Centre?", p. 24.

¹⁴ Gail Low, 'The Natural Artist: Publishing Amos Tutuola's *The Palm Wine Drinkard* in Postwar Britain', *Research in African Literatures*, 37, 4 (2006), pp. 15-33 (p. 19).

¹⁵ For example, Mark Stein's interrogation of the term 'generation', referred to in the Introduction to this thesis, suggests a natural relationship between the Windrush generation and later generations of 'black British' writers.

Lamming considered the appearance of a dozen or so published novelists in the British Caribbean to be something of a phenomenon worthy of serious consideration. There was, he said, no comparable event in culture anywhere in the Commonwealth during the same period.¹⁶ Some of these novelists may indeed have been 'in' the Caribbean, but others were not. Many, as we have seen, had moved to London, often motivated by the hope of better publishing prospects. Jan Carew, a review of whose book in the *Times Literary Supplement* provoked Lamming's indignant outburst above, had settled temporarily in London, but also lived at various times in America, France and the Czech Republic. Others were similarly scattered around the globe.¹⁷ None, however, had novels published in the Caribbean.

Despite the predisposition of some British publishers that inclined them towards new writing from the Commonwealth, the contemporary reception of literature coming out of Africa, the Caribbean and India varied enormously, from encouraging to downright patronising. In what is presumed to be the review referred to by Lamming above, of Carew's novel *The Wild Coast*, Arthur Calder Marshall stressed Carew's migrant status which, he implied, could account for this particular story of a boy growing up in British Guyana. At the same time, Calder-Marshall drew the reader's attention to 'beautiful episodes in the jungle'.¹⁸ Reaction such as this, which focused on the author's knowledge and presentation of local topography, was not uncommon. It has been attributed to the fact that West Indian literature was used by its readers in Britain as a window onto another world beyond British shores.¹⁹ As Lawson-Welsh and Low both demonstrate, contemporary critical assessments of texts by black writers tended to either eulogise or to pour scorn on what were considered to be authentic portrayals of local colour and

¹⁶ Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile*, p. 29.

¹⁷ Lamming does not make clear to which review he is referring. It is likely that it is Arthur Calder-Marshall, 'Uprooted Blooms', *Times Literary Supplement*, 19 December 1958, p. 733.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ See Kwame Dawes, 'Negotiating the Ship on the Head: Black British Fiction', *Wasafiri*, no. 29 (1999), pp. 18-24 (p. 19) in which he writes that 'Britain was more interested in seeing the worlds outside of Britain through these writers'.

character.²⁰ Kwame Dawes has argued further that West Indian writers were not unaware of this, and recognised 'that revealing their West Indianness was a useful and profitable approach to being black writers *in Britain*' (my emphasis).²¹ He describes the situation for black writing in Britain during the 1950s and 1960s as 'a compromise with history [...] made between the British critics and publishers and the writers themselves'.²² Dawes's assessment of the relationship between various agents involved in the life cycle of a text, and their interaction with external forces, evokes a clear image of Darnton's 'communications circuit'. In this instance, the 'history' referred to is the complex relationship between the migrant writer and the host society. This was based on the fact that writers from the West Indies were considered to be alien, immigrant voices that came from and belonged elsewhere. Aspects of this relationship were replicated outside of the 'circuit', as the host adjusted to the 'alien' black presence in British society. This reaction has also been picked up on by Sarah Lawson-Welsh. It is reflected, she says, in some of the 'hasty, ill-informed, occasionally even malicious pronouncements which emanated from some parts of the British critical "establishment" in relation to this new literary and physical "arrival"'.²³

Lawson-Welsh reveals some of the generalisations and stereotypes frequently associated with Caribbean literature at the time. These emphasised the exoticism of the scenery and the simplicity of the indigenous people, and reinforced the notion of otherness surrounding the writers and their work in the 1950s. She quotes Jeanette Allis as identifying the fact that contemporary critics tended to foreground 'the lushness of the scenery, the passion and exoticism of the tropics, and the simple but happy native folk with their humorous speech'.²⁴ More positively, both Lawson-Welsh and Low discuss the

²⁰ See Sarah Lawson-Welsh, 'New Wine in New Bottles', in *The Routledge Reader in Caribbean Literature*, ed. by Alison Donnell and Sarah Lawson Welsh, (London: Routledge, 1996) pp. 261-268 and Low, "Finding the Centre".

²¹ Kwame Dawes, 'Negotiating the Ship on the Head', p. 19.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Lawson-Welsh, 'New Wine in New Bottles', p. 261.

²⁴ J Allis, 'A Case for Regional Criticism of West Indian Literature', *Caribbean Quarterly*, 28 (1982), pp. 1-11, in Lawson-Welsh, p. 262.

significance of the role played by periodicals such as *The London Magazine* and the *Times Educational Supplement* in predicting the inevitable expansion of British literature to include writing from America and the Commonwealth, and in reviewing and publishing creative writing in English by authors at home and overseas.

Other parts of the cultural establishment also played a key role in nurturing literature from the Commonwealth. At the BBC, the pioneering literary radio programme 'Caribbean Voices' (1943-1958) and the less successful 'Talking to India' (1941-1943) actively encouraged West Indian and South Asian writers living in Britain and abroad to contribute towards and participate in broadcasts. Ruvani Ranasinha argues that the failure of 'Talking to India' which ran for only two years, in comparison to the fifteen year run enjoyed by 'Caribbean Voices', should be viewed in terms of contemporary politics and the nationalist positions of its participants and its very limited success in India where it reached few listeners and was poorly received.²⁵ By way of contrast, 'Caribbean Voices' has been widely credited with influencing the development of Caribbean writing by broadcasting the work of writers living in both the Caribbean and in Britain.

Through its solicitation of scripts via the programme's agent in Jamaica, 'Caribbean Voices' offered encouragement to struggling writers in the Caribbean. Thus encouraged, many migrated to Britain in search of better publishing prospects. Once resident in Britain, they were helped to further their early literary careers by the continued efforts of 'Caribbean Voices' and through the network of contacts built up by means of this radio programme. Its impact has been acknowledged by the writers themselves and recognised widely by academic scholars.²⁶ George Lamming acknowledged the crucial role played by Henry Swanzy, the longest serving editor of the programme:

Our sole fortune now was that it was Henry Swanzy who produced
'Caribbean Voices'. At one time or another, in one way or another, all the

²⁵ Ranasinha, *South Asian Writers in Twentieth Century Britain*, p. 37.

²⁶ See Philip Nanton, 'What Does Mr Swanzy Want? Shaping or Reflecting? An Assessment of Henry Swanzy's Contribution to the Development of Caribbean Literature', *Kunapipi*, 20, no. 1 (1998), pp.11-20 and Low, "Finding the Centre?", for example.

West Indian novelists have benefited from his work and his generosity of feeling. [...] No comprehensive account of writing in the British Caribbean during the last decade could be written without considering his whole achievement and his role in the emergence of the West Indian novel.²⁷

‘Caribbean Voices’ acted like a publishing house, a creative writing school and a literary club, and became a focal point for the Caribbean literary community in Britain. Accordingly, connections were made between writers and other functionaries along the ‘circuit’, including patrons and literary agents. ‘Caribbean Voices’ built up a creative network of writers, critics and members of the literary establishment. It is useful to consider this radio programme as being one network within the literary field in which various agents collaborated, and through which Caribbean literature passed during the 1940s and 1950s. Henry Swanzy was the lynchpin of this network, being both friend and patron to many writers. He held informal discussions of literary work at his own home where West Indian writers could meet and talk to one another, and made introductions to critics and other prominent British writers. He also paid writers, commissioned reviews and criticism from London and the Caribbean, and employed West Indians living in Britain to read work.²⁸ He acted as a champion of Caribbean literature and a mentor to writers from the Caribbean recently arrived in Britain. He was succeeded in his role as editor of ‘Caribbean Voices’ by V.S. Naipaul, who in turn was replaced by Edgar Mittelholzer.

Some of the relationships that were forged via ‘Caribbean Voices’ were augmented by cultural associations like the Caribbean Artists Movement (CAM), which ran from 1966-1972.²⁹ CAM was born out of a forum for the meeting of Caribbean-descent writers, artists and students in Britain. It was founded by the Caribbean intellectual and publisher, John La Rose, and the writers Andrew Salkey and Edward Brathwaite in 1966, and

²⁷ Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile*, p. 67.

²⁸ Low, “‘Finding the Centre?’”, p. 29.

²⁹ Anne Walmsley has looked more closely at these connections in Chapter Two of her book-length study of the Movement, *The Caribbean Artists Movement 1966-1972*.

brought together many high-profile West Indian writers and intellectuals in Britain including Lamming, Naipaul, Harris and C.L.R. James. The story of CAM has been chronicled in great detail by Anne Walmsley, but it is worth mentioning that, like 'Caribbean Voices', it too acted as a champion for Caribbean literature in Britain and the West Indies. In Chapter Six, the importance of CAM in relation to the development of New Beacon Books bookselling and book-publishing activities will be considered in more detail.

By 1972 CAM had run its course, with many of its members – including some of the writers of the Windrush generation – either relocating elsewhere or returning to the Caribbean. Whilst it was active, however, one of CAM aims was to have Caribbean arts recognised in Britain without the qualifiers 'black' or 'West Indian', thus achieving the infiltration of Caribbean literature in English into the mainstream canon. Cultural objectives such as these were inextricably linked with contemporary politics. La Rose, Salkey and Brathwaite were drawn together by their shared literary and political interests. There was also frequent overlap between such groups; like, for instance, CAM and the more radical Black Power Movement. As Sarah White explained in an interview in 2006, people going to CAM meetings might be equally interested in the political books as well as the cultural and creative ones.³⁰

For an example of how black culture and politics were intertwined, one need look no further than the life and work of John La Rose (1927-2006), elder statesman of the black community in Britain. As well as being a poet and a publisher, John La Rose was a political activist, motivated by a desire to take his part in the struggle for cultural and social change in Britain. He was involved with the Black Education Movement from the 1960s and fought against the perceived wrongful placing of West Indian children in schools for children with learning difficulties. He founded the George Padmore Supplementary School for West Indian children in 1969 and helped found the Caribbean Education in Community Workers Association. Later, in 1975 along with other concerned

³⁰ Philippa Ireland, 'Conversation with Sarah White', recorded 10 August 2006. See Appendix 2, below, pp. 232-239.

parents he founded the Black Parents Movement. The Black Parents Movement, in alliance with the Race Today Collective and the Black Youth Movement, became a particularly powerful cultural and political movement. The alliance formed the New Cross Massacre Action Committee in response to the arson attack, referred to earlier, which resulted in the death several young black people. In addition to co-creating CAM, La Rose was co-founder and joint director/organiser of the International Book Fair of Radical Black and Third World Books (1982-95). The Fairs represent a significant period in the cultural and political history of Britain's black population. They operated as an interface between culture and politics, and provided opportunities for cultural expression and discourse on local and international issues.³¹ Most importantly in terms of this thesis, they were a platform from which publishers could sell their books direct to the general public, libraries and elsewhere. The opportunities for publishers offered by the Fairs cannot be underestimated, and will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four.

For now, attention will return to the post-war period and to the publication by Faber & Faber of the Nigerian writer, Amos Tutuola, and the Guyanan, Wilson Harris. Faber's publication of these two writers characterises the period described, when some mainstream British publishers were particularly receptive to new, exciting and innovative literature emanating from around the world. A discussion of Faber's activities offers a useful example of one publishing house's involvement in the publication of black writers and writing during the 1950s and 1960s, prior to a general falling off in mainstream interest in black literature from the 1970s. It also has relevance to the wider thesis in that it shows how publishing was, and how it began to change in the second half of the twentieth-century.

* * *

³¹ For more information about the Book Fairs see Sarah White, Roxy Harris, and Sharmilla Beezmohun, *A Meeting of the Continents: The International Book Fair of Radical and Third World Books - Revisited* (London: New Beacon Books, 2005).

Faber has an established reputation as a publisher of quality literary fiction and non-fiction. Its focus has always been on creative writing and poetry, biographies, memoirs, political and religious essays, art and architecture monographs, and children's books. It has never been seen to be a black publisher in the sense that it actively sought out manuscripts by black writers or appeared to be more disposed towards black literature than any other, contemporaneous mainstream publisher.³² Nevertheless, with closer examination it can be seen that Faber does have a history of involvement with writers and writing from Africa and the Caribbean, beginning with their publication of Amos Tutuola's *The Palm Wine Drinkard* (1952).³³

Amos Tutuola was a writer of folk fantasies. Significantly, his first novel, *The Palm Wine Drinkard*, was the first work of literature to be written in English by a West African to be published in London. It was, as a consequence, the first Nigerian book to achieve international recognition. Faber's publication of this particular novel exemplifies their willingness to take risks on new writers and experimental writing. Indeed, it was described by Tutuola's own editor at Faber & Faber, Alan Pringle, as 'something of an experiment'.³⁴ In a letter dated 10 April 1952 to accompany the review copy of the novel for the undergraduate magazine, *New Durham*, it was commented that *The Palm Wine Drinkard* was 'one of the first purely African pieces to come out of Africa and [...] it merits a good deal of attention for that reason alone'. The novel's originality was plainly in line with Faber's policy of publishing innovative writing.

If Faber & Faber harboured any initial doubts about the experimental nature of this particular publication, these were assuaged when interest in the novel was generated and sales of *The Palm Wine Drinkard* reached a respectable, though modest figure. In 1954

³² It must be stressed that throughout this discussion concerning the publication of Amos Tutuola and Wilson Harris by Faber & Faber, the descriptor 'black' is used within the context elaborated upon in the Introduction. There is no archival evidence to suggest that Faber published either writer because they were 'black' in the sense that this came to be used as a political and cultural label. Rather, as we shall see, the new and experimental approach that these authors brought to literature in English was in line with this publisher's strategy of publishing innovative writing.

³³ Amos Tutuola, *The Palm Wine Drinkard* (London: Faber & Faber, 1952).

³⁴ Alan Pringle to Dr Geoffrey Parrinder, unpublished letter dated 22 January 1953, Faber Archive.

Pringle wrote to Tutuola that sales of *The Palm Wine Drinkard* had reached 1700 copies.³⁵ Faber's commitment to publishing this rather 'strange story', as *The Palm Wine Drinkard* was described in a letter from Pringle to Dr Geoffrey Parrinder, was justified when good sales of Tutuola's second book, *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* (1954) were also achieved.³⁶ Sales figures of 2800 copies for this book were taken to suggest that despite being something quite new to English readers, Tutuola's work was held in some regard.³⁷ Faber went on to publish almost all of Tutuola's oeuvre, maintaining their commitment to publish interesting, distinguished and imaginative fiction, despite the fact that none of his later work was able to match the success, in terms of sales, of his first two publications.

Since 1960, Faber & Faber have also published the complex literary fiction of Caribbean writer Wilson Harris. Harris was born in Guyana in 1921. After completing his education he worked from 1942 until 1958 as a government surveyor. He then changed career, becoming a lecturer and writer. His intimate knowledge of the savannas and vast rain forests of the country's interior was used to create the settings for much of his fiction. In 1959 he moved to London. He first wrote poetry, but went on to become a renowned novelist and essayist. *Palace of the Peacock* was his first novel. It was the first in a quartet of novels, all published by Faber & Faber, and which include *The Far Journey of Oudin* (1961), *The Whole Armour* (1962) and *The Secret Ladder* (1963).

The relationship between Harris and his editors at Faber has been described by Faber editor, Frank Pike, as 'the most rewarding [...] in my personal and professional life'.³⁸ Yet research in some of the papers in the Faber & Faber archive reveals the challenges and dilemmas faced by those involved in the publication of this particular writer. It is clear from both Frank Pike's account of his relationship with Wilson Harris, his admiration for Harris as both a writer and a person, and from archival material, that his publishers respected Harris's dedication and the 'integrity and the austerity of his commitment to an

³⁵ Faber & Faber to Amos Tutuola, unpublished letter written in 1954, Faber Archive.

³⁶ Alan Pringle to Dr Geoffrey Parrinder, unpublished letter dated 22 January 1953, Faber Archive.

³⁷ Faber & Faber to Amos Tutuola, unpublished letter written in 1954, Faber Archive.

³⁸ Frank Pike, 'Wilson Harris at Faber & Faber', *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, 17, no. 2 (Summer 1997), pp.104-106 (p. 104).

artistic vision and its means of expression',³⁹ and were impressed with the 'great literary and imaginative qualities' of his writing.⁴⁰ However, it is also evident that, from the very beginning, Faber harboured some doubts about the saleability of Harris's books and were apparently hesitant at first to take on *Palace of the Peacock*, despite its obvious merits. Their publication of *Palace of the Peacock*, like their earlier publication of *The Palm Wine Drinkard*, entailed taking a calculated risk on a then unknown novelist.⁴¹ In the case of Harris, Faber & Faber undertook to trust their literary instincts when they decided to publish this novel.⁴²

In both cases, Faber's gamble on Tutuola and Harris was an act of commercial risk-taking. It was a calculated gamble, made possible because of the contemporary climate, which permitted publishers to take a chance on first-time novelists. These debut novelists were not necessarily expected, or required, to achieve instant success, but to accumulate critical attention and commercial benefits over time. It is worth recalling that publishing has changed greatly since the 1950s and 1960s, and that in the modern era publishers are more likely to adopt a short-term approach to the publication of literary fiction, with a view to maximising profit. Faber has, to some extent, managed to buck this trend. It has been recognised by Eric de Bellaigue that this particular publishing house's strategies have consistently included a commitment to culture and to standards of production, which together have ensured that their publishing decisions are not made on purely commercial grounds.⁴³

This is evident in the publication of Wilson Harris. In a letter to Harris written in 1960, Charles Monteith described how it was hoped that *Palace of the Peacock* would 'attract attention among serious and discerning reviewers and readers and establish Wilson

³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 105.

⁴⁰ Charles Monteith to Wilson Harris, unpublished letter dated 29 April 1960, Faber Archive.

⁴¹ Although some of Harris's poetry had been published in Guyana prior to 1960, *Palace of the Peacock* was the first of his twenty five novels to be published.

⁴² Pike, 'Wilson Harris at Faber & Faber', p. 105.

⁴³ Eric de Bellaigue, *British Book Publishing as a Business since the 1960s: Selected Essays* (London: The British Library, 2004), p. 200.

Harris's reputation'.⁴⁴ These hopes were eventually realised. Harris has been recognised as one of the outstanding literary innovators of the century. He was awarded the Guyana Prize for Literature in 1987, and has been nominated for the Nobel Prize for Literature for lifetime achievement four times. Nevertheless, at first, Faber did not 'hold out much hope of large sales, at least in the immediate future' since Harris's novel was considered to be 'not for ordinary readers'.⁴⁵ This evidence alone suggests that Faber & Faber were realistic, not optimistic, in their hopes for Harris's critical and commercial success. It requires a considerable effort and degree of intellect in order to grasp and appreciate his work. His work was described as of 'a recondite and almost esoteric nature' by Charles Monteith in a letter to David Powell of Booker McConnell in 1968. In the same letter, Monteith admitted that 'sales of [Harris's] books have been extremely small' and 'very few of [Harris's] books have earned for him more than £100 in royalties'.⁴⁶ In general, however, Faber & Faber remained convinced that Harris's literary talent would eventually be recognised. In 1968 Charles Monteith wrote to Douglas Cleverdon at the BBC that he was 'delighted to find that Wilson Harris is now at last beginning to be noticed by the critics and taken seriously in all sorts of places';⁴⁷ and later, in 1971, Monteith described Harris as 'probably the most distinguished living writer of his native Guyana and among the most notable talents of the Caribbean'.⁴⁸

Yet, even as Harris began to achieve critical recognition from the late 1960s onwards, the saleability of his books continued to be problematic for both the author and his publisher. Faber & Faber were acutely aware of Wilson Harris's limited readership and the effect of this on sales of his books. There is evidence to suggest that, despite Faber's focus on 'culture and standards of production', it was later forced to make decisions about the publication of Harris's work on an increasingly commercial basis. In the mid-1970s,

⁴⁴ Charles Monteith to Wilson Harris, unpublished letter dated 29 April 1960, Faber Archive.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Charles Monteith to David Powell, unpublished letter dated 6 November 1968, Faber Archive.

⁴⁷ Charles Monteith to Douglas Cleverdon at the BBC, unpublished letter dated 2 August 1968, Faber Archive.

⁴⁸ Charles Monteith to Neil Megaw, unpublished letter dated 9 December 1971, Faber Archive.

the economy was blamed for a reduction in new publishing activities at Faber which delayed the publication of two novels, *Da Silva da Silva's Cultivated Wilderness* and *Genesis of the Clowns*. This led to a proposal to publish both books in one volume (this came out in 1977 alongside three other Faber novels, all priced at £3.95 as a result of savings made by using the same printer for each and redistributing some of the production costs).⁴⁹ Unfortunately, rising costs of production – the result of economic inflation – were not offset by sales of Harris books which continued to be disappointing – usually less than 1000 copies – and which remained limited to his established, but still small following of specialist readers.

Small sales of Harris's work may well be attributed to a widespread reduction in sales of serious fiction, and more specifically to the fact that his novels had limited general appeal. This may have been compounded by the increasingly negative tone adopted by some reviewers in the 1970s who reflected the fact that Britain was at this time in the middle of a period of heightened racial tension. The tenor of some 1970s reviews of black writers reveal a lack of appreciation for literature from the Caribbean and expose some of the bigotry directed towards black people in Britain more generally. Sarah Lawson Welsh looks in detail at the critical reception of writers from the West Indies in 'New Wine in New Bottles'.⁵⁰ In this, she quotes from a particularly condescending and overtly racist review of Wilson Harris's *Black Marsden* by Auberon Waugh, in which Harris is implicitly grouped along with other black writers, collectively described as 'negro writers' hailing from the West Indies, and in which Waugh's apparent ignorance about the respective homelands of each of these migrant writers is exposed.⁵¹ This particular review is highlighted in two separate files in the Faber Archives. It is evident from these sources

⁴⁹ Frank Pike to Wilson Harris, unpublished letter dated 14 July 1977, Faber Archive.

⁵⁰ Sarah Lawson Welsh, 'New Wine in New Bottles', in *The Routledge Reader in Caribbean Literature*, ed. by Alison Donnell and Sarah Lawson Welsh, (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 261-268.

⁵¹ A. Waugh, 'Review of Wilson Harris's *Black Marsden*', *The Spectator*, 1972, p. 1009 in Lawson Welsh, 'New Wine in New Bottles', p. 266.

that whilst Wilson Harris took personal affront at the review/er, Faber gave it little credit and chose to ignore it.⁵²

Harris and his publishers at Faber experienced a somewhat problematical relationship. At times, this teetered on the verge of total breakdown. Archival material reveals how, in 1966, Faber had proposed to Harris that he might wish to find an alternative publisher for his novel *The Waiting Room*, which was considered by them to be almost too obscure for publication (this novel was subsequently published by Faber in 1967).⁵³ Some of his books were considered by Faber to be 'rather strange',⁵⁴ 'increasingly difficult to understand'⁵⁵ and at times bewildering. None of his work has ever been immediately saleable. In spite of all this, Wilson Harris has remained in print with Faber for over forty years.

Evidently, one of the factors that sustained this relationship was Faber's recognition, early on, of the importance of Harris work within the context of wider developments in Caribbean literature. In 1968, Charles Monteith described Wilson Harris as 'perhaps the most serious and important writer to have emerged in the course of the remarkable Caribbean literary renaissance over the last fifteen years'.⁵⁶ This is the phenomenon referred to by Lamming. This 'renaissance' took place during a period of heightened intellectual activity throughout the 1960s and into the early 1970s that focussed on Caribbean writers and artists located in Britain. It is typified by the activities of the Caribbean Artists Movement, and coincided with the emergence of Commonwealth Literature studies at Western universities, as we shall see in Chapter Three. Out of this milieu emerged a growing specialist readership for books by Caribbean, African and Indian writers.

⁵² *Black Marsden* File & Wilson Harris 21/15 File, Faber Archive.

⁵³ Charles Monteith to Wilson Harris, unpublished letter dated 4 February 1966, Faber Archive.

⁵⁴ Charles Monteith to Douglas Cleverdon at the BBC, unpublished letter dated 20 December 1967, Faber Archive.

⁵⁵ Charles Monteith to Wilson Harris, unpublished letter dated 4 February 1966, Faber Archive.

⁵⁶ Charles Monteith to David Powell of Booker McConnell, unpublished letter dated 6 November 1968, Faber Archive.

In 1960, the same year that Faber first published Wilson Harris, they also brought out an anthology of West Indian stories edited by Andrew Salkey, *West Indian Stories*. Contributors included Sam Selvon, George Lamming, Jan Carew, John Hearne and John Figueroa. In a *Times Literary Supplement* review of the book in 1960, these authors are depreciated as 'busy West Indians [...who] have clubbed together to produce in *West Indian Stories* a spirited and talented anthology of what they can do in this line'.⁵⁷ Their efforts are described as 'uneven', 'naïve' and 'skylarking'. Once again, the position of these writers as outsiders in Britain is reinforced when the reviewer concludes, 'how talented these visitors from the warm islands are'. Mainstream reaction to *West Indian Stories* may have focused on the exile status of writers from the Caribbean in England; however mounting academic interest in literature from the Commonwealth led to this particular anthology being reprinted in 1968.⁵⁸ In response to Faber's 1967 decision to publish *West Indian Stories* as a paperback, Salkey wrote that he was 'delighted' since 'apart from V.S. Naipaul, most of the other authors have been left out in the cold these last few years'. With a nod towards Faber's status within the book industry, Salkey was hopeful that 'a Faber paperback will be a great boost [to these writers]'.⁵⁹ Salkey's reaction to Faber's decision is interesting since it indicates a falling off in mainstream interest in black writers and writing. This is a trend alluded to by the publisher Sarah White of New Beacon Books. In 2006 she described how

Obviously there had been publishing of a number of Caribbean and African novelists in the '50s. [...] When you think about the people who took part in CAM – or the novelists publishing at that time – they *were* being published in actual fact. So it probably actually fell off more in the '70s, rather than the '60s.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ David F. Williams, 'Collection Box', *Times Literary Supplement*, 2 December 1960, p. 773.

⁵⁸ Andrew Salkey, *West Indian Stories* (London: Faber, 1960; repr. London: Faber, 1968).

⁵⁹ Andrew Salkey to Charles Monteith, unpublished letter dated 13 May 1967. Faber Archive.

⁶⁰ Philippa Ireland, 'Conversation with Sarah White', recorded 10 August 2006. See Appendix 2, below, pp. 232-239.

In terms of its continued involvement with black writers, Faber did not publish any *new* black writers until the poet, essayist and dramatist, Derek Walcott, in 1982.⁶¹ It subsequently published other writers hailing from the Caribbean, including Earl Lovelace (whose *Salt* won the Commonwealth Writers Prize in 1997) and Caryl Phillips. Faber's publication of Phillips' award-winning debut novel, *The Final Passage* (1985) marks the emergence of a new generation of black British literary novelists. As James Procter describes, 'at the time of its publication in 1985, the novel broke new ground as the first "second generation" black British novel to return to the experience of the so-called "Windrush generation"'.⁶² Caryl Phillips is another writer who has resisted the label, 'black British'. Yet, as a Caribbean-born, raised-in-Britain novelist he was at the vanguard of black British creative writing in the mid-1980s.

Faber was not alone in publishing creative writing by black writers in Britain during the 1950s and 1960s. Other publishers were equally open to new writing in English from Commonwealth countries. Faber does, however, stand out as a publisher that straddled both this period and the later phase in the publishing history of black fiction writers and writing in Britain.

⁶¹ Faber's first publication of Walcott's work was *The Fortunate Traveller* (London: Faber and Faber, 1982).

⁶² See *Contemporary Writers: Caryl Phillips*, The British Council, Available: <http://www.contemporarywriters.com/authors/?p=auth80> [2 February 2010] (Critical Perspective).

Chapter Two

MULTICULTURALISM IN BRITAIN, 1970s – 1990s

This chapter advances the thesis chronologically. It looks at shifting political and cultural agendas in Britain from the 1970s to the 1990s, focussing on the various perspectives that have underpinned contemporary multicultural policy in Britain. These strategies were to have a direct impact upon the education of children, the provision of public services and state sponsorship of the Arts throughout the period. In this, and subsequent chapters, the intention is to situate the remainder of the thesis within its wider historical context.

Essentially, multiculturalism is an ideological reaction to the existence of several cultures within one society, a reaction that generates a set of policies and practices in order to enact a specific agenda. In a 2007 *Observer* profile of Stuart Hall, it was argued that he ‘might lay claim to having invented the idea of multiculturalism in Britain’.¹ However, looking back, Hall now voices his own dissatisfaction with the reductive manner in which the suffix in ‘multiculturalism’ was used to address the realities of a multicultural society. This dissatisfaction is most clearly expressed in the introduction to a lecture Hall gave the week following the publication of The Runnymede Trust’s report on *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain*² in which he says:

Over the years the term ‘multiculturalism’ has come to reference a diffuse, indeed maddeningly spongy and imprecise, discursive field: a train of false trails and misleading universalities. Its references are a wild variety of political strategies. Thus conservative multiculturalism assimilates difference into the customs of the majority. Liberal multiculturalism subordinates

¹ Tim Adams, ‘People: Stuart Hall’ *The Observer*, 23 September 2007, Review, p. 8.

² ‘The Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain’ was launched by the Runnymede Trust on 27 January 1998. It was developed from the idea of updating and extending Jim Rose and Nicholas Deakin’s landmark report *Colour and Citizenship* which was published in 1969. The Commission’s final report (The Parekh Report) was released on 11 October 2000.

difference to the claims of universal citizenship. Pluralist multiculturalism corrals difference within a communally segmented social order. Commercial multiculturalism exploits and consumes difference in spectacle of the exotic 'other'. Corporate multiculturalism manages difference in the interests of the centre.³

This quotation pinpoints some of the varied and sometimes controversial forms of multiculturalism in Britain. It effectively highlights the diverse and unsatisfactory nature of multicultural policy and practice as it has been implemented in Britain over the course of the second half of the twentieth century. Other quotations from political commentators both emphasise its complexities and reinforce the fact that multiculturalism remains in the twenty-first century a much debated and contentious subject.

For instance, the renowned political theorist, Bhikhu Parekh, set out the underlying facts about some of the terms commonly associated with multiculturalism and cultural diversity in 2000 when he wrote, 'a multicultural society, [...] is one that includes two or more cultural communities. [...] The term "multicultural" refers to the fact of cultural diversity, the term "multiculturalism" to a normative response to that fact'.⁴ Like Hall, Parekh has paid particular attention to the 'ism' in multiculturalism. He has described the doctrine of 'multicultural-ism' as denoting a celebratory response to and philosophical justification of a multicultural society. It is in this sense, according to Parekh, that Britain developed and remained committed to multiculturalism from the 1970s onwards.⁵ This is evident, he says, in the Rampton and Swann Reports – which looked at the education of West Indian children and *all* children in British schools, respectively – and the Runnymede

³ Stuart Hall, *The Multicultural Question*, Pavis Papers in Social and Cultural Research (Open University, 2001), p.3.

⁴ Bhikhu Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), p. 6.

⁵ Parekh put forward this particular description of multiculturalism in a paper written for Labour Prime Minister, Tony Blair, in 2006 so that he might speak about the role of multiculturalism in a modern and evolving society. It was contrasted with 'multi-culturalism', which he argued is primarily isolationist in outlook and has generally been endorsed by those opposed to multiculturalism. See *Bhikhu Parekh - Multiculturalism*, 2006, Number10.gov.uk. Available: <http://www.number10.gov.uk/Page10558> [20 November 2009].

report on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain (which coincidentally, Parekh chaired between 1997 and 2000).⁶

Nick Pearce, former director of the Institute for Public Policy Research, an ostensibly independent think-tank but which has strong leanings to the Left, argued along the same lines in 2005, that ‘until recently multiculturalism was a byword for mutual respect, equal rights and the celebration of diversity. It was the accepted common sense of the political mainstream and liberal media’.⁷ Pearce set out the key components of contemporary multicultural strategy when he continued, ‘on one level [...] multiculturalism is simply a description of practices which are common to many progressive democracies: race equality strategies, public recognition of cultural diversity, and sensitivity, within the framework of public law, to religious beliefs’. These practices did not come into effect overnight. Rather, they came about as the result of a gradual move into multiculturalism, which began in the 1950s and has continued to the present day. Over the course of half a century, this process passed through three identifiable phases: assimilation, integration and multiculturalism. In its most recent incarnation, multiculturalism has taken the form of cultural pluralism.

Britain’s progression into a multicultural society is seen by many to have been achieved as a direct result of post-war immigration. In the years prior to 1970, following the docking in Britain of the SS Empire Windrush in 1948, nearly half a million people left their homes in the West Indies to live in Britain. They were all British citizens and all had the right to enter, work and settle here if they wished. Some were returning soldiers who had fought for Britain during the Second World War. Thousands of others came here hopeful of better opportunities for themselves and their children, and often with the intention of working, saving and then returning home. In the previous chapter it was shown how a small number of these migrants came wanting to establish literary careers in Britain.

⁶ Anthony Rampton, *West Indian children in our schools: Interim report of the Committee of Inquiry into the education of children from ethnic minority groups* (London: HMSO, 1981) and Lord Swann, *Education for all: the report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Education of Children from Ethnic Minority Groups* (London: HMSO, 1985).

⁷ Nick Pearce, ‘Goodbye to multiculturalism, but welcome to what?’ *Parliamentary Brief* (1 December 2005).

Many others had been recruited specifically to run the transport system in Britain, and to be postal service and hospital workers.

In addition, many unskilled, skilled, and professional workers migrated from India to Britain after 1947, following its independence from colonial rule. This migration is commonly attributed to Britain's post-war demand for low-skilled labour, to colonial ties, and to the United Kingdom's commonwealth immigration policy. Throughout later decades, thousands of dependants of these early settlers also came to Britain. In 1972, after their expulsion from Uganda, around 30,000 Asians also sought asylum in Britain.⁸

In response to these waves of immigration from the Caribbean, from post-independence India and from East Africa into Britain, multicultural policies were developed to accommodate the settlement of people from these regions. The first of these policies was 'assimilation'. This supported the idea of a single dominant culture and/or religion into which new ethnic groups should fit and be absorbed. During the 1950s and 1960s it was intended that migrants to Britain would leave behind many of their own, traditional customs and culture, and take on those of the majority British people. The Commission for Racial Equality describes how the aim of assimilation was:

the absorption of minority migrant communities into the majority community with no noticeable effect on the culture and way of life of the majority, while expecting that the culture and way of life minorities brought with them would disappear.⁹

In effect, assimilation worked towards the creation of a monoculture. It was rejected in favour of a more integrationist approach in the mid-1960s, and it was at this time that a discourse of equality began to unfold. In 1967 Roy Jenkins, the then Home Secretary, defined integration 'not as a flattening process of assimilation' but one of 'equal opportunity, accompanied by cultural diversity, in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance'.

⁸ *On this day, 7 August 1972: Asians given 90 days to leave Uganda*, BBC. Available: http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/august/7/newsid_2492000/2492333.stm [3 February 2010].

⁹ *Integration, multiculturalism and the CRE*, 2006, Commission for Racial Equality. Available: <http://www.cre.gov.uk/diversity/integration/index.html.pr> [24 May 2007].

Ostensibly, integration promised all people the right to their particular cultural expression. Yet the contemporaneous struggles of the black community in Britain for equality and justice reveal that the battle for equal opportunity, cultural diversity, and mutual tolerance in terms of race was hard fought. These struggles reached a climax in 1981, when clashes occurred between young black people and the police in Brixton, London, and rioting ensued. A significant outcome of these riots was the publication of the Scarman Report, one of the most influential reports in post-war Britain.¹⁰ Amongst other things, this report identified the cause of the riots to be serious social and economic problems affecting Britain's inner cities. The findings of the report led to the introduction of measures specifically intended to improve the relationship between the police and ethnic minority communities. However, further race riots occurred in major cities, including Liverpool and London, in 1981 and 1985.

'Multiculturalism' as a policy instigated by the then government came about in response to the Brixton riots and the ongoing struggles of the black community. It was at this point, in the early 1980s, that the black dimension of British society was recognised, if not wholly accepted. Correspondingly, the attention of multicultural policy shifted to the needs of the different ethnic, cultural and religious groups in Britain. One of the solutions to the problems of racial disadvantage, identified in the Scarman report, was the provision of support – financial and advisory – for black community groups. This was to have a particular enabling effect on the publication of black British literature, as Chapter Five will reveal.

Less impact, however, was made upon national legislation in relation to multicultural policy by the Conservative government under Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s than in previous decades. Under Thatcher's leadership, the Conservatives were inclined to regard multicultural rhetoric and policies as associated with left-leaning local councils. As former Director of Literature at the Arts Council of Great Britain, Alastair Niven, recalled in a recent interview, attempts by the Arts Council to encourage the recognition and

¹⁰ Lord Scarman, *The Brixton Disorders, April 10-12, 1981: Inquiry Report* (HMSO, 1981).

development of literature that reflected all aspects of modern British society were made in spite of, rather than because of, the political context. In his view, during the Thatcher years there wasn't very much political interference, but there was not a lot of encouragement either.¹¹

Notwithstanding the Conservative Party's hands-off approach to multiculturalism, many local councils strove to enact anti-racist and racial equality policies, and to promote multicultural education throughout the 1980s. As journalist Yasmin Alibhai-Brown tells us, these equal opportunities policies were put in place in order to 'transform the racial composition of [the local authority] workforce and to realise the obligations which they had under Section 71 of the Race Relations Act: to "make the appropriate arrangements...to promote equality of opportunity" and "good relations between people of different racial groups"'.¹² On the one hand, these efforts were perceived by some – including central government – to be radical and heavy-handed. Antagonism was directed in particular towards the Greater London Council (GLC) and Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) for its hard-line anti-racist strategy.¹³ At the other end of the political spectrum, the councils that implemented strategies like these were seen to be pioneering in their approach.¹⁴

Between the 1970s and the 1990s, multiculturalism became a nationwide phenomenon, albeit one that was taken up with varying degrees of enthusiasm and effectiveness at national and local level. Cultural pluralism became the mainstream articulation of multiculturalism in the late 1980s. As the author of *Pluralism and the Politics of Difference: State, Culture, and Ethnicity in Comparative Perspective* (1998),

¹¹ Dr Alastair Niven in conversation with Philippa Ireland, 1 November 2007.

¹² Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, *True Colours: Public Attitudes to Multiculturalism and the Role of the Government* (London: Institute of Public Policy Research, 1999), p. 67.

¹³ An extended discussion of the anti-racist approach to the provision of educational services by ILEA, a 'special committee' of the Greater London Council, and which was the education authority for the 12 inner London boroughs from 1965 until its abolition in 1990, appears in Chapter Three.

¹⁴ See for example, Yasmin Alibhai-Brown (whose political affiliation is to the Social Democrats and whose leanings are openly towards the Left), who has argued that 'many of the good ideas, particularly in education, were targeted for criticism because they were beginning to have an impact' in Alibhai-Brown, *True Colours*, p. 68.

Ralph Grillo puts it, by this point ‘the keynote was participation plus diversity’.¹⁵ Yet according to Grillo, pluralism was as ill-defined as its precursor, multiculturalism. He describes it as neither a fully worked out theory or programme, nor a readily identifiable social state. It was, he says, ‘an emergent phenomenon, the outcome of a multiplicity of international, national, and perhaps above all local and specific accommodations on a range of issues [...] whereby immigrants enter the society, and probe definitions of acceptable pluralism to their very limits’. Considered thus, immigration can be seen to have been a constant driving force behind multiculturalism in its various incarnations. Over the years multiculturalism has embodied a variety of political strategies. It has been exposed to much criticism and susceptible to challenges on many fronts. One of the threats to multiculturalism in the late 1980s was the so-called Rushdie Affair, which as Grillo tells us, tested pluralism to its limits.¹⁶

Within the context of this thesis, a brief consideration of the ‘Rushdie Affair’ will provide a pertinent example of a particular moment in publishing history when the transmission of a text through society was directly affected by external forces, and vice versa. It is an important moment in the history of the development of multiculturalism in Britain, the details of which have been well documented by scholars elsewhere.¹⁷ Put simply, the ‘Affair’ refers to the response by Muslims to the publication of Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses* (1988).¹⁸ Its repercussions were felt by the book’s publisher, throughout the book industry, and across the world. In the immediate aftermath of its publication, episodes of violence and book burning took place, prompted by Rushdie’s

¹⁵ See R. D. Grillo, *Pluralism and the Politics of Difference: State, Culture, and Ethnicity in Comparative Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 193-4.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

¹⁷ See for example, John C. Swan, ‘*The Satanic Verses*, the *Fatwa*, and its Aftermath: A Review Article’, *Library Quarterly*, 61, no. 4 (October 1991), pp. 429-443. This article summarises some of the fall-out of the publication of this novel, and reviews three key texts that were written about the ‘Rushdie Affair’ and which were published in the United States in 1990: William J. Weatherby, *Salman Rushdie: Sentenced to Death* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 1990), Daniel Pipes, ‘*The Rushdie Affair: The Novel, the Ayatollah, and the West*’ (New York: Carol Publishing Group, Birch Lane Press, 1990), and Lisa Appingnanesi and Sara Maitland (eds.), *The Rushdie File* (New York, Syracuse University Press, in association with the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, 1990). All of these were considered to be useful accounts, although the latter was thought by Swan to provide the most indispensable and widely consulted account of the ‘Affair’ and reaction to it.

¹⁸ Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses* (London: Viking Penguin, 1988).

perceived profanity against Islam and what was considered by Muslims to be his irreverent depiction of the prophet Muhammad. By October 1988, aggressive letters and phone calls were being directed towards the book's publisher from Muslims angry with the book and demanding that it be withdrawn. The 'Affair' escalated dramatically and on an international scale, resulting in the proclamation of a 'fatwa' (a death sentence) upon Salman Rushdie, his enforced move into hiding, and the temporary severing of diplomatic relations between the UK and Iran.

From a publishing perspective, the furore that followed the publication of *The Satanic Verses* had an impact at every level. Pressure was felt by senior managers at its publisher, Penguin, and by editorial and administrative staff and bookshop personnel. The proclamation of a fatwa had menacing implications for publishing employees and associates around the world. Threats of physical violence were issued against Penguin employees and their families, bombs were exploded in Penguin bookstores, Japanese and Italian translators of the novel were attacked, and a Norwegian publisher shot. Peter Mayer was then Chief Executive at Penguin. He recently defended his company's decision to first publish, and to continue to publish, the novel. In 'The Right to Publish' he describes how,

in publishing this book, Penguin had, initially, done nothing extraordinary.

We bought out a literary work by an author who had written several books previously, books of merit, one of them – *Midnight's Children* – a contemporary masterpiece. The political and religious issues that emerged certainly had not been considered when Penguin made its commitment to publish the novel.¹⁹

Mayer further defends Penguin's publication of the *Satanic Verses*, by saying that it was simply going about its 'normal work' and publishing a novel by a well-known writer.²⁰ In so doing, and despite the political crisis that erupted, Penguin succeeded in publishing an

¹⁹ Peter Mayer, 'The Right to Publish', *Index on Censorship*, 37, no. 4 (2008), pp. 121-126 (p. 124).

²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 126.

international bestseller.²¹ Nevertheless, the publicity that arose out of Penguin's publication of Rushdie's novel, and the pressing questions concerning free speech, the freedom to publish, the freedom to sell and the freedom to read that arose thereafter, came to symbolise censorship and freedom of speech, a fact that Mayer's aptly titled article recalls. The 'Rushdie Affair' was a key moment in literary history when politics exploded into publishing. It appears somewhat paradoxical that a novel which relates the immigrant experience in Britain brought about a crisis whereby culture and politics collided and which was manifest in conflict between different communities.

After he came out of enforced hiding the political questions surrounding *The Satanic Verses* and its publication were never really resolved and the wider political implications regarding free speech in societies comprising culturally diverse communities continue to resonate. Peter Mayer posed the questions 'had Penguin withdrawn the book, given the death threats and the ensuing mass protests around the world, what would the consequences have been? Would other publishers in other countries, who had previously committed to the book, have pressed forward with its publication?' His tentative response to both of these questions reveals that they are possibly unanswerable; he says 'we cannot know, but very possibly not'.²²

The end of the 1980s marks a period of waning political interest in multiculturalism and a growing preoccupation with religious, cultural and political issues, such as those brought to the fore by the 'Rushdie Affair'. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, multicultural pluralism moved out of the political limelight, although it continued to be much discussed in academic and educational circles.²³

What followed this particular period was the recognition of an increasing number of more narrowly-defined cultural groups in British society; a development which has

²¹ A useful source of information about the success of *The Satanic Verses* in the USA is the Bestsellers Database compiled by students at The Graduate School of Library and Information Science, University of Illinois. Available: <http://www3.isrl.illinois.edu/~unsworth/courses/bestsellers/search.cgi?title=The+Satanic+Verses> [19 November 2009].

²² Mayer, 'The Right to Publish', p. 121.

²³ Grillo, *Pluralism and the Politics of Difference*, p. 194.

been both celebrated and berated as cultural diversity. Notwithstanding the various labels attached to the notion of multiculturalism at different points in time over the period between 1970s and 1990s, the fact that Britain was, and still is, a multicultural society has remained undisputed for over thirty years. It is the political and ideological responses to this fact that have been, and continue to be, as diverse as the society itself.

* * *

Over the course of the period, the focus of multiculturalists' attention transferred from issues of race relations and equality, to cultural diversity. Anti-racism emerged as a major issue in the 1990s when race resurfaced on the national agenda after a black teenager, Stephen Lawrence, was fatally stabbed at a bus-stop in south-east London in April 1993. A 1997 inquest ruled he had been unlawfully killed in an unprovoked racist attack.²⁴ At this point, none of those suspected of killing Lawrence have ever been convicted. Both the murder and the publication in 1999 of the report of the government-instigated inquiry into Lawrence's death (The Macpherson Report), received mass media publicity, effectively ensuring that race remained an issue at the end of the decade.

There is no doubt that racism was an issue at the forefront of the concerns of radical black activists in Britain since the 1960s, as Linton Kwesi Johnson makes plain in his 1980 poem, 'Inglan is a Bitch'.²⁵ The murder of Stephen Lawrence thirteen years reaffirmed these sentiments.²⁶ Johnson was born in Jamaica in 1952, and moved to Britain as a youngster, in 1963. He described the Britain in which he grew up in an article for *Moving Worlds* in 2006:

Even a decade after the Notting Hill and Nottingham race riots of 1958/9,
Britain was still a decidedly hostile place for non-whites. Racial abuse was

²⁴ *The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry: Chapter Forty Two: The Inquest*, 1997, The Stationery Office. Available: <http://www.archive.official-documents.co.uk/document/cm42/4262/sli-42.htm> [19 November 2009].

²⁵ Linton Kwesi Johnson, *Inglan Is A Bitch* (London: Race Today Publications, 1980).

²⁶ Caroline Frost, *Profile: Linton Kwesi Johnson* 2003, BBC. Available: http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbcfour/documentaries/profile/linton_kwesi_johnson.shtml [4 February 2010].

commonplace, racial discrimination rife, racist and fascist attacks rampant.

There was not an institution of the state that was not riddled with racial prejudice, none more so than the police and the judiciary, who together ensured the criminalisation of a significant section of my generation of black youth. [...] The colour bar was alive and well.²⁷

This personal account of the realities of living in Britain for a black person in the 1960s and 1970s is presented here in order to breathe life into this study of multiculturalism. Johnson is perhaps best known for his poetry: he does not fit into the category of writers who were born in Britain and who chose to write about the experiences of being black *and* British through fiction, which is the main concern of this thesis. However, a short survey of his career will reveal how connections were forged between black activism, publishing and a burgeoning black British literature in the 1970s and 1980s. Set alongside the earlier study of the 'Rushdie Affair', it helps us to gain a wider understanding of the milieu out of which black British fiction would emerge.

Johnson's life and work epitomises the relationship between black culture and politics in Britain explored in the previous chapter. He was part of a group of writers and other artists who were the first to articulate specifically black British concerns in the 1970s.²⁸ These concerns were primarily radical and included issues of race, representation, resistance, empowerment and justice. James Procter tells us how Johnson's poetry is characterised by its commitment to black politics, and much of his early work was first performed at significant demonstrations in the 1970s and early 1980s.²⁹ Johnson himself has described how he came to poetry through politics. In the beginning, he says, 'writing verse was [...] a political act and poetry a cultural weapon in the black liberation

²⁷ Linton Kwesi Johnson, 'Writing Reggae: Poetry, Politics and Popular Culture', *Moving Worlds*, 6, no. 1 (2006), pp. 2-18 (p. 9).

²⁸ Alison Donnell, *Companion to Contemporary Black British Culture* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. xiii.

²⁹ A brief entry about Linton Kwesi Johnson, supplied by James Procter, and which includes short biographical and bibliographic information appears in Donnell's *Companion to Black British Culture*, p. 160. Additional biographical and bibliographical detail, and a full discography can be found online, see *Linton Kwesi Johnson*. Available: <http://www.lkjrecords.com/lkj.html> [20 November 2009].

struggle'.³⁰ As a black youth in Britain, he was, he says, 'swept along in the tidal wave of black consciousness that came in the wake of the civil rights movement in the USA'.³¹ Johnson joined the radical British Black Panther Movement whilst still at school in London,³² and it was in the Panthers that Johnson first discovered black literature: it is here that he considers where he received the greater part of his education.³³

Through John La Rose Johnson also learnt about the Caribbean Artists Movement and attended CAM meetings in the early 1970s. Although CAM had been set up in 1966 by a group of writers and intellectuals who had moved to Britain from the Caribbean in the post-war period, Johnson was one of a number of young writers who were involved with this Movement.³⁴ Their involvement in CAM and, later, in organisations like the Black Youth Movement and the Black Parent's Movement (both set up in 1975), demonstrates how the terms of black politics widened from the 1960s and into the 1970s.³⁵ Both a cultural and political agenda drove many of the organisations set up in defence of black people in Britain. Several of the same group of people were involved with these organisations. John La Rose, a Caribbean poet and publisher, for instance, had close associations with CAM, the Black Parent's Movement, and with the setting up of

³⁰ Johnson, 'Writing Reggae: Poetry, Politics and Popular Culture', p. 2.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

³² This Movement was inspired by the ideology of the militant Black Panther Party in the United States, although it responded to the specific reality of black people in the UK. As an organisation, it came about in order to combat racial oppression, discrimination in the workplace, and injustice. In the UK, the Black Panthers were organised in groups around a particular location. Linton Kwesi Johnson was a member of the Brixton Black Panthers. Other academics and writers who were members of this group include Farukh Dhondi, Darcus Howe, and Beverly Bryan. See *brixton black panthers movement* (available at <http://rememberolivemorris.wordpress.com/2007/09/27/brixton-black-panthers-movement/> [4 February 2010] for more information.

³³ Linton Kwesi Johnson quoted in Brian Alleyne, *Radicals Against Race* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2002), pp.152 & 153.

³⁴ Brian Alleyne reminds us that not all those active in the same cultural and political space as CAM took a positive view of its aims or influence. Amon Saba Saakana, for example, was critical of CAM's founders who, he felt, were too intellectual and middle-class in their outlook. His opinion highlights certain generational differences between CAM's founders and members, and a younger generation of militant activists. This divide was not, however, absolute, as Linton Kwesi Johnson's involvement in both CAM and the Black Panthers reveals. See Alleyne, *Radicals Against Race*, pp. 39-40 for more information.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

supplementary schools, the aim of which – as we shall see later – was to combat the negative cultural stereotyping of black children.

Johnson has spoken specifically of his early connections with John La Rose and with New Beacon Books. He describes La Rose as his mentor. Alongside his early cultural influences from American and African writers and the musicians of the late 1970s,³⁶ it was through John La Rose, Johnson says, that a wide range of black literature was opened up which he previously didn't know existed. It was, he describes, 'one of the formative discoveries [...] an important influence in my life ever since'.³⁷

Johnson was also a member of the Race Today Collective. His poems first appeared in print in the journal *Race Today* and his first poetry collection, *Voices of the Living and the Dead* was published in 1974 by the Race Today imprint. During the 1970s and 1980s he continued writing books of poetry, the most well-known of which are *Dread Beat An' Blood* (1975) published by Bogle L'Ouverture and *Inglan is a Bitch*. He is perhaps most famous for his dub poetry recordings, like *Dread Beat An' Blood* which was released in 1978. His later collections of poetry were published by the leading poetry publisher, Bloodaxe Books (*Tings an' Times: Selected Poems* (1991)). In 2002 he became only the second living poet and the first black poet to have his work published in the Penguin Modern Classics series under the title *Mi Revalueshanary Fren*.³⁸ Despite his long-standing international success, this breakthrough into the mainstream came more than two decades after he was first published. The publishing history of his books – from specialist independent presses to the imprint of a mainstream publishing conglomerate (Penguin Books is part of the Pearson publishing group) was mirrored elsewhere, as later chapters will reveal.

In the article for *Moving Worlds* Johnson described his discovery of black literature through the Black Panther Movement. Discovering books by black authors about black

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

³⁷ Alex Wheatle, 'A Conversation with Linton Kwesi Johnson', *Wasafiri*, 24, no. 3 (2009), pp. 35-41 (p. 35).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

people was, he recalled, 'a revelation [...] because nothing in my schooling in this country had given me the slightest hint that such a body of writing existed'.³⁹ Johnson attended Tulse Hill secondary school in London in the 1960s, at a time when multicultural education was in its infancy; the emphasis being upon assimilation and integration, and the onus placed on children from minority groups to adapt and change in order to fit into the host society. The next chapter will trace the development of multicultural education in Britain from this point onward. It examines some of the ways in which shifting educational factors influenced writers, readers and publishers of black British fiction during the second half of the twentieth century.

³⁹ Johnson, 'Writing Reggae: Poetry, Politics and Popular Culture', p. 13.

Chapter Three

EDUCATION, PUBLISHING AND BLACK BRITISH FICTION

This chapter discusses the ways in which shifting educational factors impacted on the development of black British fiction and its publication from the 1970s to the 1990s. Multiculturalism in this period began to impact noticeably on the education system. This development will be examined, before moving on to consider how the publishing industry responded to these wider socio-cultural changes. It will be shown how the publication of black writers by educational publishers during the second half of the twentieth century was consistently and directly affected by contemporary politics. In addition, mounting commercial demands impacted on all types of publishing, forcing publishers to demonstrate their profitability. As a case study of Heinemann Educational Books's publication of the African Writers Series will demonstrate, in an era of increased merger and acquisition activity throughout the industry, this led to a greater emphasis on the money-making potential of books published for both academic and general markets. The analysis here supports the conclusion drawn by the authors of *A Market Analysis of UK Educational Publishing* (2002), that educational publishing is highly susceptible to political and socio-economic forces.⁴⁰

In the second half of the twentieth-century, multicultural educational policy passed through a series of stages. Each of these stages was a reflection of the phases through which multiculturalism developed throughout the corresponding period. In the first instance, in the 1950s and the 1960s, educational policy in relation to the children of immigrants focussed on the assimilation of these children into British society. This was primarily achieved through the provision of English language teaching and their dispersal throughout the school system. This focus shifted later in the 1960s, with the introduction of

⁴⁰ Alaster Douglas, Rachel Quarrell and Erma Mustapha, *A Market Analysis of UK Educational Publishing* (2002).

‘integration’. Integration ostensibly sought to raise awareness of the cultural and historical backgrounds of various immigrant groups. The intention was to assist both immigrants and the host society in making allowances for difference, although it has been argued that this approach had the negative effect of perpetuating inaccurate and damaging stereotypes.⁴¹

In the 1970s there was a noticeable change in multicultural educational policy. Emphasis was moved from the children of immigrants onto *all* children in British schools, to help bring about the acceptance of cultural differences in society. This is cultural pluralism, the most widely accepted, now mainstream form of multiculturalism. It is also the approach favoured by the authors of the landmark report, the Swann Report, *Education for all*, in 1985:

We consider that a multiracial society such as ours would in fact function most effectively and harmoniously on the basis of pluralism, which enables, expects and encourages members of all ethnic groups, both minority and majority, to participate fully in shaping the society as a whole within a framework of commonly-accepted values, practices and procedures, whilst also allowing, and where necessary, assisting the ethnic minority communities in maintaining distinct ethnic identities within this common framework.⁴²

From this point, multicultural education involved taking a practical, holistic approach to the school curriculum that incorporated all areas of learning, the materials used in schools, and teacher training initiatives. Sally Tomlinson has described how this approach received widespread support and government endorsement.⁴³ It was, however, criticised for not doing enough to specifically tackle racism.

⁴¹ Louis Cohen and Alan Cohen, *Multicultural Education: A sourcebook for teachers* (London: Harper & Row, 1986), p. 3.

⁴² Lord Swann, *Education for all: the report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Education of Children from Ethnic Minority Groups* (London: HMSO, 1985).

⁴³ Sally Tomlinson, *Multicultural Education in White Schools*, *Education in a Multicultural Society* (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd, 1990), pp. 9-14, *Central Government initiatives*.

The corresponding anti-racist phase of multicultural education was marked by mounting politicisation and a more confrontational approach, both at local government- and ground-level. It was advocated by more militant educators, strident critics, and researchers of multicultural education, such as Bernard Coard, Barry Troyna, and Chris Mullard. Its strategy included the eradication of racism in education. It concentrated on specific issues including racial harassment and prejudice, stereotyping, and the recruitment and promotion of ethnic minority staff. It was the approach advocated by some progressive urban local authorities, usually with a significant number of ethnic minority pupils in their schools, and in particular by the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA).

In 1983, ILEA adopted an Anti-Racist Statement in order to address 'one of the three major obstacles to achieving equality – Racism', the chief victims of which were considered by the authority to be 'black people i.e. Afro-Caribbean and Asian communities'.⁴⁴ It issued a series of papers entitled *Race, Sex and Class* intended to state the authority's response to these issues. There were five papers in all, each designed for a specific purpose and targeted at both practitioners and recipients of the service. One paper is a concise statement of policy; one provides guidelines for putting this policy into practice; the remaining three papers discuss the background to the issues raised. The third paper, *A Policy for Equality: Race*, can be considered the key to an understanding of the series. Equality was adopted by ILEA in order to inform the work of the Authority and to confront discrimination and racism head-on. ILEA elected to counter the effects of racism through staff appointment and training, in the structure and content of teaching, and in the running of the school or college itself. To this end, ILEA employed five multi-ethnic inspectors within the Authority and created new posts which included curriculum co-ordinators, educational liaison officers and advisory teachers. All had the specific function of working with schools on the creation of appropriate policies and on curriculum development.

⁴⁴ This definition was taken from the 'ILEA Anti-Racist Statement' which was published as a poster in 1987 by the Inner London Education Authority.

The ILEA frequently came under fire for its overtly pro-ethnic minority policies. It was not just this authority, however, that attracted controversy. The development of multicultural education in primary and secondary schools in Britain was attacked from both within and outside of the education service. Its practical implementation was often fragmentary and inconsistent, and in some cases it was considered entirely irrelevant.⁴⁵

Despite this, the development of multicultural education was, on the whole, perceived to be both necessary and inevitable. One of the key figures in this development was Beryl Gilroy.⁴⁶ Originally from Guyana, Gilroy (1924-2001) moved to England in 1951, aged 27. She subsequently became a pioneering educationalist and the first black Head Teacher of a London school. In her book, *Black Teacher* (1976), she provided a revealing account of how black children and teachers in inner London fared under the educational system of the 1960s and 1970s.⁴⁷ Years later, she confessed that *Black Teacher* was written in a fit of pique.⁴⁸ At the same time, however, it contained a serious underlying agenda. Gilroy wanted to use this book as a vehicle 'to put the record straight, to show what it was like'.⁴⁹ For this reason, in *Black Teacher* she provided examples of her own encounters with material, cultural and spiritual poverty – deficiencies that were often articulated by children and adults alike through prejudice, discrimination and racism. Gilroy described how she personally sought to address these by constructing her own teaching ethos. Her teaching philosophy was heavily influenced by her own experiences and her early training in the Caribbean, which she combined with the child-centred philosophies and techniques of the time. In order to break down some of the barriers that

⁴⁵ In 1987, Chris Gaine published a ground-breaking book that looked at the attitude of mainly-white schools towards issues of race, *No Problem Here* (London: Hutchinson Education, 1987). It was revised and republished under the title, *Still No Problem Here* (Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books, 1995), indicating that issues of education and race in schools with small numbers of pupils from ethnic minority groups lingered well into the 1990s.

⁴⁶ Beryl Gilroy is the mother of Paul Gilroy, the radical cultural critic and historian.

⁴⁷ Beryl Gilroy, *Black Teacher* (London: Cassell and Company, 1976).

⁴⁸ Gilroy made this admission in 'I Write Because...' in *Caribbean Women Writers: Essays from the First International Conference*, ed. by Selwym R. Cudjoe (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990), pp. 195-201 (p. 199).

⁴⁹ Reva Klein, 'No grey areas', *Times Educational Supplement*, 29 July 1994, Features, p. 15.

had been raised through narrow-mindedness and bigotry she developed specific strategies to dissipate mounting tension and rivalry between different ethnic groups.

As British society continued to undergo a multiracial transformation during the 1970s, and with increasing numbers of ethnic minority children entering British schools, Gilroy had found the need to develop a multicultural approach to education ever more pressing. Her teaching experiences became increasingly more common throughout the 1970s. In response, a number of local authorities, like ILEA, actively encouraged teachers in their schools to acknowledge and to celebrate racial difference. The ILEA's pro-ethnic minority policies were blatant, but as Gilroy herself wrote in *Black Teacher*, 'it had to be realised that I hadn't been made Head Teacher as part of the rumoured policy of the Inner London Education Authority – a policy called "kindness to blacks"'.⁵⁰

Beryl Gilroy was a novelist as well as a teacher. On her arrival in Britain in 1951, however, she experienced difficulties in finding a British publisher. Sandra Courtman has attributed this to her outsider status as a woman writer from the Caribbean amidst the masculine power relations of the contemporary publishing scene.⁵¹ Despite these setbacks, Gilroy continued to write and had a children's series, *Nippers* – which she began in the 1960s – published in the 1970s. Her first novel, *Frangipani House*, was published in 1986.⁵² She also started work in the 1960s on *In Praise of Love and Children*. This is the tale of a black woman who fosters damaged children of first generation black settlers in Britain. She was unable to find a willing publisher for this novel until 1996, when it was published by Peepal Tree Press. Peepal Tree went on to publish all of her later work.

Gilroy's literary output was, in fact, considerable. It included fiction for children and adults, in addition to her memoir and educational resource, *Black Teacher*. The autobiographical nature of this particular book lent itself to being published and marketed

⁵⁰ Gilroy, *Black Teacher*, p. 181.

⁵¹ Sandra Courtman, 'Not Good Enough or Not Man Enough? Beryl Gilroy as the anomaly in the Evolving "Black British Canon"', in *A Black British Canon?*, ed. by Gail Low and Marion Wynne-Davies (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 50-73. Courtman suggests further that it was Gilroy's position outside the similarly male-dominated, West Indian literary community of the 1950s and 1960s that meant she has remained largely invisible as a creative writer.

⁵² Beryl Gilroy, *Frangipani House* (London: Heinemann, 1986).

as one of only a handful of pieces of life-writing by a black woman in Britain in the 1970s. (Buchi Emecheta's semi-autobiographical novel *In the Ditch* (1972) is another example of this type of writing, published in Britain around the same time.) Ultimately, however, this is not the strategy that was adopted for this book. Instead, *Black Teacher* was published for its timely contribution to education since, as Courtman has noted, this made it a much more marketable, and therefore potentially profitable, prospect.⁵³ Its usefulness as an educational resource was enduring, as its re-publication by Bogle L'Ouverture in 1994 and accompanying newspaper coverage in *The Times Educational Supplement* attests.⁵⁴ As Reva Klein reported, despite being first published in 1976, *Black Teacher* was as eye-opening and relevant in 1994, as it was in 1976.⁵⁵

The Grenadian academic, political activist and revolutionary, Bernard Coard also worked for two years as a school teacher in London, during the late 1960s. According to *Guardian* reporter, Polly Curtis, whilst Coard was living in the UK he came upon the first study of immigrant children in London ESN (Educationally Subnormal) schools, conducted by ILEA. It revealed, Curtis writes, a shocking picture: in 'normal' London schools, 17% of pupils were from ethnic minorities. In ESN schools, that figure was 34%, and four out of five were from the West Indies.⁵⁶ The following year, Coard authored the pamphlet *How the West Indian Child is Made Educationally Subnormal in the British School System*, which challenged inequalities and racism in British schools.⁵⁷ This pamphlet articulated some of the issues that members of the black community in Britain had been fighting against since the 1960s, and had clear resonance with the anti-racist struggles, referred to in the previous chapter, that were waged in relation to schooling and in wider society. Its publication was a boost to members of the Black Education Movement (BEM) (1969-1980s), who fought specifically against racial discrimination and

⁵³ In Courtman, 'Not Good Enough or Not Man Enough?', pp. 53-54.

⁵⁴ See Klein, 'No Grey Areas'.

⁵⁵ See *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Polly Curtis, 'Opportunity locked', *Guardian*, 1 February 2005, p.8.

⁵⁷ Bernard Coard, *How the West Indian Child is Made Educationally Sub-Normal in the British School System* (London: New Beacon Books, 1971).

marginalisation of black children within the education system and the placing of West Indian children in schools for the educationally sub-normal. The BEM was organised into committees of black parents in North London and elsewhere. One of the strategies developed by its members was the provision of supplementary schools. These schools covered traditional subjects, and provided curriculum materials that featured information about the history and cultural heritage of black peoples of African, Caribbean and Asian descent, thus helping students to establish and maintain their ethnic and cultural identities. John La Rose established the George Padmore Supplementary School (one the first of these schools), in 1969. In the same year, he helped to found the Caribbean Education and Community Workers Association. It was this Association which drew attention to the ESN situation in 1971 by initiating the publication of *How the West Indian Child is Made Educationally Subnormal in the British School System*. Later in the 1980s, La Rose helped to found the National Association of Supplementary Schools and was its chairman for two years.

Supplementary schools were established by the community, for the community. Elsewhere, efforts to broaden the curriculum in British schools were made by predominately left-leaning and/or urban education authorities, like ILEA. They were supported by independent organisations like the Association for Teachers of Caribbean and African Literature (ATCAL) which ran from 1978 to the mid 1980s; the National Association for the Teaching of English (NATE) which has been in existence since the nineteenth century; and the South Asian Literature Society (SALS), established in 1982. These particular organisations petitioned for a wider programme of multicultural literary study at schools, colleges and universities throughout Britain. Membership of these organisations comprised a wide cross section of teachers, librarians, publishers, academics and intellectuals, all of whom were concerned with developing the teaching of multicultural literature in Britain. Together they formed a community of like-minded individuals and groups that interacted in order to achieve similar goals.

One of the primary objectives of ATCAL was 'to encourage publishers to publish and to keep in print texts appropriate to different educational levels, provide background

material for information of teachers, and promote works by authors whose writing expresses the experience of those of African and Caribbean descent in Britain'.⁵⁸ In this, ATCAL made plain the connection between publishers and the development of black British literature. ATCAL stressed the need for publishers to make this literature available and, more importantly, to keep it in print.

One incentive for educational publishers to keep texts in print is their inclusion on school and university examination syllabuses. This guarantees a well defined market, comprising mainly pupils, teachers and schools. This market is relatively constant and supported by backlist sales. According to past members of ATCAL, including Lyn Innes and Susheila Nasta, both of whom were consulted over the course of this research, the Association actively and successfully lobbied examination boards to include the work of some black writers, including Chinua Achebe, Sam Selvon, V.S. Naipaul and Toni Morrison, within the examination syllabuses for secondary schools. During an interview conducted in 2006, Lyn Innes recalled that

The crucial thing was also to try and get texts onto examination syllabuses [...] one of the big battles ATCAL did undertake and which I think was reasonably successful was getting these books [by Achebe and Selvon, for example] onto examination syllabuses.⁵⁹

When pressed for specific examples, Innes remembered that Achebe's excellent and very readable *Things Fall Apart*, poems by Derek Walcott, *The Mimic Men* by V.S. Naipaul (who was by then renowned for his literary merit) and work by Toni Morrison all got adopted by various examination boards.

This would have had the effect of creating just such a guaranteed market. This could then be exploited by all types of publishers, including, for example, Heinemann Educational Books, long-time publisher of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. In turn, this meant

⁵⁸ The Association of Teachers of Caribbean and African Literature (ATCAL): Statement of Principles and Objectives, Objective No. 5. These principles and objectives were listed in a follow-up report to the 1978 OKIKE/University of Kent conference, referred to below, p. 67, a copy of which was made available for this research by Professor Lyn Innes at the University of Kent.

⁵⁹ Philippa Ireland in conversation with Professor Lyn Innes, 7 June 2006.

that black literature more broadly maintained a presence on publishers' lists and in bookshops.

All of ATCAL's lobbying and awareness raising activities took place on the basis that world-wide recognition had been accorded to African and Caribbean writers; that there was a large population of African and Caribbean descent residing in Britain; and that it was essential that all Britons understood the worth and variety of one another's cultures.⁶⁰ Set against a backdrop of developments in multicultural education, the relationship between ATCAL and publishers like Heinemann emerges as a key feature of developments in the educational publishing of black writers and writing in Britain, between the late 1970s and mid-1980s.

* * *

ATCAL was founded in 1978 at an OKIKE (the African Journal of New Writing) and University of Kent conference. It was inaugurated at a forum, entitled 'The Uses of African and Caribbean Literature: Teaching and Criticism in the UK'. This was attended by people from a variety of backgrounds, including publishing representatives from Heinemann, Hodder and Stoughton, Soma Books and Longman; members of the Committee for Racial Equality; primary and secondary school teachers; university lecturers; librarians; and community workers. At this meeting it was agreed to form a continuing association for all those concerned with African and Caribbean literature in Britain, steered by a committee that comprised in the beginning Lyn Innes (University of Kent and UK OKIKE representative), Len Garrison (Director of the African-Caribbean Education Resource Project), Alastair Niven (Director of the Africa Centre), and Lewis Nkosi (South African writer).

In the follow-up report from the OKIKE/Kent conference, the steering committee explicitly identified a role for publishers to work together with educators to promote black British literature and to develop resources for teachers of African and Caribbean literature. It is possible to get a sense of ATCAL's commitment to aiding the development of strong

⁶⁰ ATCAL's Statement of Principles and Objectives.

and productive relationships between writers, publishers, teachers and students of black British literature by browsing through the contents of some of the ATCAL newsletters, conference proceedings and reports. This material also reveals the nature of the role that the Association took on. It was a forum for discussion and debate, for giving advice and recommending suitable texts by African, Caribbean and black British authors and ways of reading these works, for raising awareness of social and cultural issues relating to the education of all children in Britain, and, as we have seen, for targeted lobbying of examination boards, educational institutions and publishers.⁶¹

To this end, between 1983 and 1985 ATCAL's publications committee produced a number of annotated Reading Guides for use by teachers in primary and secondary schools. These included *Background to African and Caribbean A Level Texts*; *African and Caribbean and Black American Book for 4th and 5th Years*; *Books for Multicultural Nursery, Infant and Junior Schools*; and *Caribbean Literature: A Discography*. In 1988 ATCAL's reading guides were republished in a new format and in collaboration with ILEA's English Centre as the *ATCAL Reading Guides: African, Caribbean and Indo-British Literature for the Classroom*. This publication featured a wide-ranging list of black British Writing which was, according to its compiler, Louis James,

an exciting list to complete. [As] British black writing is enjoying a rapid increase [...] every month has brought new titles. Many of the writers listed here are young, publishing their first work. They are being backed by an expansion in publishing, not only among the established British presses such as Heinemann, Longmans and Chatto Windus, but smaller enterprises such as the pioneering New Beacon Press, Akira Press, Bogle L'Ouverture and Black Ink.⁶²

⁶¹ The material for this aspect of my research was kindly made available by Professor Lyn Innes from her private collection of papers relating to ATCAL.

⁶² In *ATCAL Reading Guides: African, Caribbean and Indo-British Literature for the Classroom*, ed. by John Stephens, (London: ATCAL Publication and The ILEA English Centre, 1988), p. 42.

James also alluded to a corresponding growth in community publishing of black writers. This was, he said, part of a social movement that was stimulated by poetry readings, discussion and the growing confidence of younger members of the British black community. This development led him to propose that 'the time [was] ripe for this to filter into school teaching'.⁶³ His observations draw attention to the link between education, publishing and the development of black British literature generally. More specifically, comments like these support the argument that the publication of black British fiction has taken place within the framework of shifting cultural, political and social contexts. It was also within this context that members of ATCAL worked towards broadening the school curriculum for literature. ATCAL's publication of annotated reading guides was designed to be an added stimulus to the teaching of multicultural literature in Britain. They were boosted by the publication of the Swann Report in 1985, which, as we have seen, advocated adopting a pluralist approach to the education of children in the British school system.

In parallel, the English and Media Centre (formerly the ILEA English Centre) continued with its encouragement of teachers and the teaching of black literature in schools, maintaining its support for a multicultural approach to the literature curriculum. The 1990 issue of the Centre's magazine, *The English Magazine*, for example, included an article by Suzanne Scafe, the author of *Teaching Black Literature* (1989),⁶⁴ which sought to contextualise the work of three Caribbean woman writers and to highlight the critical value of each.⁶⁵ This is the kind of activity that ATCAL was also involved in. The Association was particularly keen to engage the interests of teachers – both at school and university level. In order to do this it held conferences at which the teaching possibilities of specific texts were discussed. It also encouraged groups of teachers in different parts of the country to meet regularly on a more informal basis – much like the modern book group

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Suzanne Scafe, *Teaching Black Literature* (London: Virago, 1989).

⁶⁵ Suzanne Scafe, 'Out of the Ghetto: Teaching Black Literature', *The English Magazine*, 24 (Autumn 1990), pp. 12-14.

– to discuss whether specific books by African, Caribbean or black British writers would be good material to introduce into the school syllabus.⁶⁶

ATCAL was very much an association for its time. Indeed, Susheila Nasta has described how the ‘need for ATCAL began to get less and less as a national organisation in an era when regional Education Authorities [like ILEA] were setting up multi-cultural inspectors and multicultural teachers in schools’.⁶⁷ By 1985 it had been wound down almost entirely, although the journal *Wasafiri*, which was founded in 1984 by Susheila Nasta, still uses an amended version of Association’s original constitution as a basis for its charity status to this day.

Wasafiri was one of the most important material products to come out of the demise of ATCAL in the mid-1980s. In the beginning, *Wasafiri*’s aim was to focus on African, Caribbean, South Asian and associated literatures in Britain and to provide serious literary coverage for authors from these backgrounds. As Nasta put it, ‘what we were trying to do was to create a forum for conversations between writers and to signal the evolution of a community of texts which could speak to each other across worlds’.⁶⁸ It was actively encouraged and financially supported by the Greater London Council and by the Arts Council England. In 2004, Nasta described the origins of *Wasafiri*’s relationship with the Arts Council: ‘we became a regular client of the Arts Council in 1991, [prior to this] *Wasafiri* had been dependent for its survival on one-off grants from various public funding pockets and academic institutions. [...] we got a one-off grant to publish a Black-British issue in the 1980s from the GLC [...] then we sometimes got bits of cultural diversity funding’.⁶⁹ Alastair Niven, former Literature Director at the Arts Council, has described how *Wasafiri* slotted neatly into the aims of the Arts Council to support ethnic minority writers and their work. In the twenty-fifth anniversary edition of *Wasafiri*, Niven wrote,

⁶⁶ Dr Alastair Niven in conversation with Philippa Ireland, 1 November 2007.

⁶⁷ Nasta, cited in Cicely Havely, ‘Whose English is it Anyway?’ *The English Review*, 6, no. 1 (1995), p. 26.

⁶⁸ Jonathan Barker, ‘Making Tracks: Susheila Nasta in conversation with Jonathan Barker’, *Wasafiri*, 42 (Summer 2004), pp. 80-85 (p. 82).

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p. 84.

‘awarding [*Wasafiri*] funding was not a hard decision, though it was taken by an advisory panel that included some of the most prominent literary people in the country. The journal from the start fitted the new brief of the Arts Council, which was to recognise diversity’.⁷⁰

Journals like *Wasafiri*, and *Third Text* (first published in 1987 to provide critical perspectives on art and visual culture), nurtured a concomitant and growing interest in black British literature and Black Arts. Like ATCAL, they provided a timely forum for debate about a diversity of cultural practices which were considered to have been marginalised through racial, gender, religious and cultural differences. These journals contributed towards the discussion and (re)appraisal of literature and the Arts and were a crucial medium through which a growing scholarly interest in black British literature could be articulated. In an interview with Jonathan Barker commemorating the journal’s twentieth anniversary in 2004, Susheila Nasta recalled how its ‘history is a story that parallels in some ways many of [the] shifts and turns in the cultural politics of literature’.⁷¹ *Wasafiri* was instrumental in bringing work by African, Caribbean, Asian and black British writers to (greater) prominence and thus to the attention of the mainstream. The community of writers, teachers, academics, and publishers who grew up around this journal and who have contributed to it over the course of the last twenty-five years, is one of a number of networks that have existed, with a common interest in developing African, Caribbean and black British literatures.

These networks were often linked by individual members with shared concerns and agendas. For example, Alastair Niven, who is currently on the board of *Wasafiri*, was a member of ATCAL’s original steering committee and a one time Director General of the Africa Centre in London. He was also editor of the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*. Others include Vicky Unwin, who was a publisher of Heinemann’s African Writers Series and ATCAL committee member, and the writer and academic, David Dabydeen, who was the last Chair of ATCAL and a member of the Arts Council’s Literature Advisory Panel.

⁷⁰ Leila Aboulela and others, ‘Memories, Dreams and Reflections’, *Wasafiri*, 24, no. 3 (2009), pp. 80-94 (p. 90).

⁷¹ Jonathan Barker, ‘Making Tracks’, p. 81.

Some of the other notable figures who were closely associated with both ATCAL and *Wasafiri* include the publishers Margaret Busby and Anne Walmsley, journalist Maya Jaggi, authors Sam Selvon, Abdulrazak Gurnah and Caryl Phillips, Prabhu Guptara and Ronald Warwick, whose article 'Myth or Reality' for *Assistant Librarian* will be featured in the next chapter.

ATCAL's members considered that all of Britain's youth were in a sense experiencing a form of cultural deprivation if they were not given the opportunity to read African and Caribbean literatures alongside the traditional canon. Members of other groups shared this conviction, and together they worked towards broadening the content of literature teaching within the school curriculum in order to reflect these principles. Past members of ATCAL, including Susheila Nasta, have stressed that the aims and achievements of the Association, its members and of similar organisations were not carried out on a wave of fashionable multiculturalism. Instead, Nasta has argued, they represented a genuine attempt by many to engage all students with new experiences, in an attempt break down barriers of prejudice, discrimination and racism through the study of creative writing.⁷²

As Beryl Gilroy explained in *Black Teacher*, such barriers often stemmed from ignorance. They were sustained by the use of outdated textbooks and teaching aids that reinforced colonial attitudes and assumptions that were inherent in society, politics and education at the time. The use of misleading textbooks that contained 'defunct imperialist views of other cultures and ancient facts and statistics' was one of the failings identified in a document from The Educational Publishers Council (EPC), *Publishing for a Multi-Cultural Society*.⁷³ This was published in 1983 in response to the formation of the Swann Committee of Enquiry into the Education of Children from Ethnic Minority Groups.

⁷² Nasta's opinions to this effect were expressed during an informal conversation with the author in 2007. The impression given by Nasta was reinforced by Professor Lyn Innes and by Liz Gerschel in separate dialogues with the author in the same year.

⁷³ Educational Publishers Council *Publishing for a Multi-Cultural Society* (London, Educational Publishers Council, 1983), p. 2.

In *Publishing for a Multi-Cultural Society* the EPC apparently committed itself to promoting the idea of modern multicultural Britain, yet simultaneously kept a degree of distance from any specific involvement in related initiatives and movements by maintaining a purely advisory and informative role. The result was a rather passive endorsement of how the demands and attitudes of society at the time were changing to take into account Britain's multicultural society, and an exhortation to educational publishers to remain flexible and alert in order to be able to respond to these changes.

Significantly, the EPC acknowledged the requirement for these publishers to reconcile ideology and commercial interest. This is perhaps the crux of the matter. At the end, the Council passed the responsibility for the publication of 'adequate and representative material' for use in schools onto consumers of books, namely teachers, examination boards, parents and children. It was thought that consumers would play a key role in effecting the necessary social change that would, in turn, generate a market for books that contained positive representations of ethnic minorities. These would then be available for use in schools. The conclusions drawn by the EPC have been considered disappointing, considering that, as Klein reminds us, they came out of the single most relevant body in the production of educational books in the UK.⁷⁴ They are also clearly indicative of developments taking place within wider publishing, which placed greater emphasis on the commercial aspects of book publication.

The EPC's position can be described at best as 'on the fence'. Its stance reinforces the difficulties faced by those wishing to broaden the literature curriculum. Further challenges arose from the fact that there was rarely any consistency in the teaching of literature between institutions and across the country.⁷⁵ As the Swann Report identified in 1985, from the beginning 'the few schools which did show commitment [to multicultural education] received no "clear guidance from LEA or central government" on how to

⁷⁴ G. Klein 'The Development of Multicultural and Antiracist Books for Use in Schools 1973-1993' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Central England, 1997), p. 148.

⁷⁵ This inconsistency was also a feature of the provision of public library services, which resulted in the ad hoc implementation of multicultural library services across Britain. This development will be considered in greater depth in the next chapter.

translate commitment into practice'.⁷⁶ Evidently, this hands-off approach was maintained as multicultural education developed throughout the 1980s and into the early 1990s. Writing in 1989, Gerschel and Nasta argued that the 'lack of central leadership from the British government on issues in education in and for a multi-ethnic society and the controversy surrounding this debate has led to the development of fragmentary and arbitrary policies and practice nationally'.⁷⁷ At the same time, Gerschel and Nasta observed that both primary and secondary schools were, in fact, further advanced in their thinking in relation to delivering multicultural English teaching than most higher education institutions.⁷⁸

This assessment is corroborated by looking at the contents of early issues of *Wasafiri*. Here it appears that, well into the 1980s, the study of African and Caribbean literature was confined to pockets of activity at selected universities throughout England and Scotland. These universities include Leeds, Sheffield, Kent, Edinburgh, Stirling, Sussex and The Open University.⁷⁹ It is useful at this point to outline how the study of, what is now termed, postcolonial literature and discourse emerged at British universities, to understand how this development influenced a generation of readers and writers of black British fiction.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Lord Swan, *Education for All*, p. 228 quoted in Robert Bush, 'The National Curriculum and Multicultural Literature', *Wasafiri*, 17 (Spring 1993), pp. 33-38 (p. 33).

⁷⁷ Liz Gerschel and Susheila Nasta, 'There's no such thing as "only literature": English teaching in an anti-racist and multicultural context', in *Dialogue and Difference*, ed. by Peter Brooker and Peter Humm (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 132-148 (p. 134).

⁷⁸ Gerschel and Nasta, 'There's no such thing as "only literature"', p. 141.

⁷⁹ Throughout the mid-late 1980s, *Wasafiri* reported on some of this activity. See Lyn Innes, 'Activities: African and Caribbean Studies at the University of Kent', *Wasafiri*, 1 (Autumn 1984), pp. 27-28; 'Activities', *Wasafiri*, 1, no. 2 (Spring 1985), pp. 41-42; and 'Activities', *Wasafiri*, no. 3 (Autumn 1985), pp. 36-39.

⁸⁰ It is widely acknowledged that the beginnings of postcolonial studies were multiple. Graham Huggan has identified two of the paths followed in the development of contemporary postcolonial studies. In his examination of how postcolonial texts have been marketed and consumed, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*, Huggan assigns the terms 'Anglophone/Commonwealth' and 'US/Minority' to the paths taken in UK and USA respectively. It is the former trajectory which can be traced back to a handful of conferences held in England in the 1960s, the most important of which was held at Leeds in 1964. See Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 230.

This potted history begins with the development of African and Caribbean area studies courses at Leeds, Sheffield, Kent and Sussex in the 1950s. These particular courses involved scholars who had previously taught in newly created university colleges in Africa or the West Indies. They were primarily concerned with history, politics, anthropology and religion: literature wasn't seriously considered until the early 1960s. Courses covering African and Caribbean literature specifically emerged out of these early Area Studies programmes. In the late 1970s/early 1980s the courses offered at Sussex and Kent, for instance, continued to focus on particular areas and were often interdisciplinary. In contrast, those set up at other universities concentrated on Commonwealth literature per se.

Dennis Walder has mapped out the development of Commonwealth literary studies in *Post-colonial Literatures in English: History, Language, Theory* (1998), in which he describes the phenomenal speed with which the study of Commonwealth literatures emerged and became institutionalised.⁸¹ By the early-mid 1980s however, the notion of 'Commonwealth' literary studies, which was geographically restricted and generally limited to the study of Indian, African, West Indian, Canadian, New Zealand and Australian literature in English, had become somewhat destabilised. This was a result of both a mounting challenge to the notion of a canon of books which conformed to a central tradition, and calls to include a wider range of books from around the world written in English. It was at this point that the idea of 'New Literatures' began to emerge and to take the place of 'Commonwealth' literary studies. Whilst the terminology, critical approach and ideological underpinnings of Commonwealth literary studies appears to have fallen out of favour at this time,⁸² the concept of 'New Literatures' itself was also open to debate. Much of this debate centred on the fact that the prefix 'New' by implication suggests, erroneously, that these Literatures – from Africa, the Caribbean, Australia, Canada, and India – had no established traditions, that they emerged out of a literary vacuum. 'New Literatures' courses were criticised as a result for ignoring the work of nineteenth and early

⁸¹ Dennis Walder, *Post-colonial Literatures in English: History, Language, Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998).

⁸² Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic* p. 233.

twentieth century writers like Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (India, 1838-1894) and Claude McKay (Jamaica, 1889-1948), for example. As a result, by the early 1990s few 'New Literatures in English' courses had found their way onto the literature programmes of Western universities.⁸³

Dennis Walder recently recalled some of his early encounters with the writings of authors from some former colonised territories at the University of Edinburgh in an article entitled 'Decolonizing the (Distance) Curriculum'.⁸⁴ In this article, Walder tells us that at Edinburgh during the 1970s the option of 'Caribbean and West African Literature' was taught by Paul Edwards, who had been an English lecturer in Sierra Leone, and Kenneth Ramchand, from Trinidad. Walder credits Edwards and Ramchand with 'bringing into the light hitherto unknown texts by black slaves and colonized subjects from Africa and the Caribbean [...], promoting a greater awareness of the experiences and reflections of peoples formerly invisible to the mainstream literary curricula'.⁸⁵ It took considerably longer for 'invisible' texts to be incorporated into the educational mainstream. In 1983, *The New Pelican Guide to English Literature: Vol 8*, part of the Pelican series of books for university students, featured chapters on Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka, and V.S. Naipaul. The inclusion of these writers in this particular academic text represents an exception rather than a rule. The general absence of texts from outside of the accepted canon within key academic publications and on university courses in English literature was lamented by scholars into the late 1980s and early 1990s. However by the late 1980s, postcolonial discourse had started to take root, and with it the idea of 'Postcolonial Literature'. One of the first books to put forward a selection of key and influential texts on

⁸³ One exception to this rule was the Open University's 'New Writings in English' unit, which was part of its *Literature in the Modern World* course (A319). This course attracted thousands of students throughout the 1990s. The aims of this particular block were to show the rich variety of the upsurge in literary creativity in English in countries formerly part of the British Empire. It is worth noting that three of the authors discussed within this block were winners of the Nobel Prize for Literature: Derek Walcott, V.S. Naipaul, and Wole Soyinka. Elsewhere, Queen Mary and Westfield College (part of the University of London) incorporated a compulsory 'New Literatures in English' module within the first year of its BA in English Literature in the mid-1990s. This module was initiated with help of Susheila Nasta.

⁸⁴ Dennis Walder, 'Decolonizing the (Distance) Curriculum', *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education*, 6 (2007), pp. 187-196.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 189.

postcolonial theory and practice in relation to Literature was Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin's, *The Empire Writes Back* (1989).⁸⁶ Since then the incorporation of postcolonial theory into literary and cultural studies has become widely accepted.

The development of postcolonial literary studies at tertiary level was propelled by a number of individuals and groups, striving to open up the options available to students of Literature. Some of the beneficiaries of this push into postcolonial literary studies were the black British writers who were first published in the 1980s and 1990s. A number of these writers were students on the pioneering degree programmes at universities like Kent, Leeds, Sussex and Stirling. There was, in fact, a whole group of writers or budding writers who took courses at these universities, including Faustin Charles, Valerie Bloom, Sandra Agard, Amryl Johnson, Jackie Kay, and Fred D'Aguiar.

Lyn Innes has described how a growing interest in the cultural impact of immigration and the activities of organisations such as the Caribbean Artists Movement in the 1960s, generated considerable student interest in courses on African, Caribbean and Indian subjects, at both undergraduate and postgraduate level.⁸⁷ Not only was the cultural life of British universities enhanced by students from a variety of backgrounds who were attracted to these courses, but these multidisciplinary courses also nurtured a growing sense of confidence in a new generation of black Britons.⁸⁸ Universities that encouraged the specialist study of African and Caribbean literatures helped to introduce black writers and writing to students who had not previously been exposed to this type of literature at school.

The previous chapter closed with some remarks made by Linton Kwesi Johnson about the lack of books by black authors about black people available in British schools during the 1960s. His comments have been echoed by other, younger black British writers. They have spoken of the feelings of isolation and loneliness associated with being unable to identify with the predominantly white characters and experiences featured in the vast

⁸⁶ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back* (London: Routledge, 1989).

⁸⁷ Innes, 'Activities: African and Caribbean Studies at the University of Kent', p. 27.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

majority of available English literature. At a cultural event in 2006, *Black British and Proud*, Courtia Newland talked about the absence of literature that had any resonance for him when he was growing up. Similarly, in his Introduction to *The European Tribe*, Caryl Phillips describes how it wasn't until he visited the USA that he realised that it was possible for a black person make a career as a writer. He blames his 'ignorance' about these things on his 'education and [...] own lack of a coherent sense of identity in 1970s Britain'. Significantly he goes on to say that 'in British schools I was never offered a text that had been penned by a black person, or that concerned the lives of black people'.⁸⁹ It is from this starting point, a complete absence of literature by and about black people in Britain, that groups of teachers, librarians, publishers and others, began to work towards incorporating African, Caribbean and black British literature into the mainstream school curricula. Their efforts in this area worked to encourage future generations of black British writers and exposed new readerships for books that spoke specifically to the experience of young black Britons.

By the 1990s, many publishers had caught on to the potential of black British fiction. In the 1970s and 1980s, however, there was a paucity of home-grown black literature on publishers' lists and available in bookshops. Like Phillips, aspiring black British writers growing up in Britain at this time were forced to look to America for their literary influences. Speaking as a panel member considering the 'challenges and choices facing diverse voices in the UK' at Cheltenham Literature Festival in 2006, black British novelist Bernadine Evaristo described how in the 1980s the only books by black authors available to her were by Americans, not black British writers. It has been argued that one of the reasons for British publishers' predilection for publishing black American writers and writing was the fact that mainstream publishers presumed there was only a limited market for books by, for and about African, Caribbean and black British people in Britain. Andrea Levy, for example, considers that some of the problems she experienced in finding a publisher for her early work can be attributed to the fact they 'thought the book was only

⁸⁹ Caryl Phillips, *The European Tribe* (London: Faber and Faber, 1987), p. 1.

going to sell to black people'.⁹⁰ Levy's argument here will be considered in more detail in Chapter Nine in the examination of the role of literary prizes in the publication of black British fiction. It is an argument that has been echoed elsewhere, when Margaret Busby described how many publishers, literary agents and bookseller continue to uphold the fallacy that the only audience for black books is black, and that only black people buy books by black writers. This, she declared, is clearly not the case.⁹¹ However, as we shall see in later chapters, getting the book industry to alter its way of thinking has proved time and again to be a fruitless task.

Not all publishers operated under this preconception. Some responded differently, and more quickly, to the socio-political developments that have been surveyed in this and previous chapters, and which did in fact open up new markets for the work of black writers, both in Britain and around the world. Heinemann Educational Books (HEB) is one publisher that was actively involved in the selection, marketing and distribution of African and Caribbean literature, for both academic and general markets, from the early 1960s onwards. It is an example of one publisher who – to paraphrase Diana Athill – was in on the ground of Commonwealth publishing right from the start, and whose activities in this area laid some of the groundwork for the future publication of black British writers and writing.⁹² The following study reveals how this particular publisher was affected by changes taking place within wider publishing, and by shifting cultural and political contexts over the course of the period.

* * *

This history of Heinemann Educational Books' African Writers Series has been the subject of many academic studies, books and publishing memoirs. Most recently James Currey, Editor in Charge of the Series from 1967 to 1984, has written a very personal and thorough account telling the story of the Series and its influence upon the development of African

⁹⁰ Levy in Benedicte Page, 'After the Windrush' *The Bookseller* (10 October 2003), p. 23.

⁹¹ Philippa Ireland, 'Conversation with Margaret Busby', recorded 25 May 2006. See Appendix 1, below, pp. 229-235.

⁹² Diana Athill, *Stet* (London: Granta Publications, 2000), p. 103.

Literature.⁹³ A great deal of the published material about the Series focuses, naturally, on its influence on African writers and Heinemann's impact upon African publishing generally. Currey, for example, has delved into a wealth of correspondence and other archival material concerning the African Writers Series and has drawn upon his own experiences whilst working at Heinemann, in order to present an insider's perspective of contemporary publishing practices in Africa during the 1960s, '70s and '80s. Here, the focus is different in that the following study looks specifically at the African Writers Series in terms of its presence in the UK and Western markets. The intention being to show how this and other Series that were intended primarily for overseas markets also carved out a niche at home and how, by publishing and keeping in print certain authors at a time when mainstream interest in black writers and writing appeared to be dropping off, this laid some of the groundwork for a later generation of black British writers of Afro-Caribbean origin.

The African Writers Series was created by Heinemann Educational Books in 1962. It was not, however, designed merely as an add-on to Heinemann's existing conventional school textbook publishing activities. Instead, under the editorship of Chinua Achebe, the Series quickly established itself as a highly successful literary paperback publishing venture with a presence in Africa and in other countries around the world. As Lyn Innes noted in an article celebrating thirty years of the AWS for *Wasafiri* in 1992,

⁹³ For more information about the origins of the African Writers Series, its influence on African writers and Heinemann's impact upon African publishing generally, see Loretta Stec, 'Publishing and Canonicity: The Case of Heinemann's "African Writers Series"', *Pacific Coast Philology*, 32, no. 2, Convention Program Issue (1997), pp. 140-149; Kirsten Holst Petersen, 'Working with Chinua Achebe: The African Writers Series', in *Chinua Achebe: A Celebration*, (1990), pp. 149-159; Matt Kibble, 'The African Writers Series Reborn: An Electronic Edition', *Wasafiri*, 46 (Winter 2005), pp. 66-68; Ruth Hamilton-Jones, *The African Writers Series*, Oxford Brookes University. Available: <http://www.brookes.ac.uk/schools/apm/publishing/culture/colonial/aws.html> [14 July 2006]; and James Currey, 'The State of African Studies Publishing', *African Affairs*, 85, no. 341 (1986), pp. 609-612. A full account of the African Writers Series, from its beginnings to the present day is provided by Robert Fraser and Nourdin Bejjit in their scholarly introduction to the online edition of the Series. This was published by ProQuest's Chadwyck-Healey unit in 2005. Bejjit has also written up the history of the Series at some length in Chapters One and Two of his PhD thesis, 'The Publishing of African Literature: Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and the Heinemann African Writers Series, 1962-1988'. Bejjit's discussion of the achievements of the Series and the conditions and circumstances that led to its eventual decline is particularly useful for its focus on the human factors involved in its development. Similarly, James Currey's *Africa Writes Back: The African Writers Series and the Launch of African Literature* (Oxford: James Currey Ltd, 2008) provides a fascinating insight into the people involved with the Series: its writers, editors, managers and readers. Currey's narrative is particularly revealing since it is based on his own experience and draws heavily on primary archival sources, in particular on readers reports and correspondence between Series' authors and publishers.

when Achebe resigned his General Editorship in 1972, the African Writers Series had become a resounding success in both Africa and the West, establishing African writing as a powerful creative force with a variety of models for new writers in Africa. It had also become the main source for the burgeoning courses on African writing in African, American and British universities.⁹⁴

The motivation for the African Writers Series was markedly different to that of its Longman counterpart – the Drumbeat Series – and indeed for its sister series, Heinemann's Caribbean Writers Series (CWS); both of which were, from the outset, purely educational in nature. The publisher's policy for the Caribbean Writers Series was to include questions on the text as part of the introduction to each book, aimed at secondary pupils and at university undergraduates. Ian Randle, who set up Heinemann's Caribbean operations and developed the Caribbean Writers Series alongside James Currey, stated in a letter to Dr Sandra Pauchet-Pacquet written in 1977, that introductions should be pitched at the secondary level but should not be over-simplistic or juvenile so as to put off academic readers.⁹⁵ Each introduction was intended to stimulate interest in the book itself, to clarify the point of the story and its themes, to assist with character analysis, and to set the book in the general context of the Caribbean and other writing. The CWS market was divided into titles appropriate for schools, and novels appropriate for college use. There is little archival evidence to suggest that, unlike Heinemann's flagship African Writers Series, genuine efforts were ever made to broaden the market for the Caribbean Writers Series. In point of fact Heinemann's aim for CWS titles was inclusion on the Caribbean Examinations Council syllabi: once listed, strong sales were guaranteed for several years.

By 1972, more than 100 titles – mainly originals, but also some translations and paperback reprints – had been published in the African Writers Series. Despite its obvious success, there is evidence to support claims made by some observers of African literature

⁹⁴ C.L. Innes, '30 Years of African Publishing', *Wasafiri*, 16 (Autumn 1992), p. 31.

⁹⁵ Ian Randle to Dr Sandra Pauchet-Pacquet, unpublished letter dated 7 March 1977, Heinemann Educational - HEB 46/6; HEB Archives, University of Reading.

and its publication that, after a series of take-overs, the necessity to make each Series profitable led to a reduction in size of both Heinemann's African and Caribbean Writers Series.

In 1961, a year before the creation of the AWS, Thomas Tilling had acquired full control of Heinemann. In 1983, Heinemann was taken over by the British Tyre and Rubber conglomerate. Two years later the company was taken over once again, by The Octopus Group.⁹⁶ It was later taken over for a fourth time by Reed International. It has been suggested that in each of these four instances the motivation for Heinemann's take-over was purely financial, to the detriment of African literature and publishing. Vicky Unwin, a dynamic publisher who worked at Heinemann from the late 1970s to the early 1990s, and who was publishing director of the Heinemann African Writers Series during the 1980s, recently conceded that the very idealist beginnings of the Series were gradually overshadowed by the need to make it profitable, and that 'profitability became critical especially when Heinemann was owned by BTR and then by Reed'.⁹⁷ This sentiment echoes one previously voiced by the Series' founder Alan Hill in 1990, when he described the differing motivations of Chinua Achebe and of Heinemann at the conception of the AWS. Whereas Achebe was concerned with furthering Nigerian writing through the African Writers Series, Heinemann was always thinking in terms of generating a viable market for the Series and of making a profit. The requirement to make a profit from the Series developed greater urgency over time, as Hill recounts:

[...] you have to remember that we were not dominated by a money-grabbing ideology in those days. Publishing has changed a lot since then, and I don't really care for the accountancy-ridden profit-making of present-

⁹⁶ Eric de Bellaigue, *British Book Publishing as a Business since the 1960s: Selected Essays* (London: The British Library, 2004), p. 91.

⁹⁷ This comment was made in a personal email communication to Philippa Ireland, 29 October 2006.

day publishing firms which are now in the grip of big corporations who are only interested in the profits which the products make.⁹⁸

Bernth Lindfors has written equally scathingly of the specific events which took place at Heinemann in the 1980s:

Heinemann [...] found itself taken over by British Tyre and Rubber and then by other corporate raiders who were more interested in increasing their profits than in promoting the development of a foreign literature; the African Writers Series was not completely jettisoned, but was so severely reduced in scope and significance that it ceased to serve as an important outlet for new, experimental writing from Africa.⁹⁹

The requirement to reduce the size of the Series ultimately led to the resignation in 1984 of James Currey, its editor in charge since 1967, after BTR demanded that the AWS be reduced from over twenty titles a year, to one or two. One year later, the Series underwent its first major revamp. In fact, each of Heinemann's overseas educational series underwent several reincarnations between 1985 and 1996. Evidence revealing how the image of the Series was developed and how attempts were made to exploit new markets for AWS books has been found in the many memos and reports concerning the African and Caribbean Writers series between these years, now stored within the archives at Reading University.

The last publication of the African Writers Series in its original, and what had become its familiar, black and orange format was in 1985.¹⁰⁰ Bejjit describes how the uniform look of early AWS publications, from 1962-1986, was part of a premeditated marketing strategy. It was a strategy that Heinemann would employ once again, at this time and later on.¹⁰¹ 1986 saw the reissue of some of the Series' major writers in new, brightly

⁹⁸ Alan Hill in Kirsten Holst Petersen, 'Working with Chinua Achebe: The African Writers Series', p. 157.

⁹⁹ Bernth Lindfors, 'Desert Gold: Irrigation Schemes for Ending the Book Drought' in *Long Drums and Canons* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1995) pp. 123-135 (pp. 123-4) in Loretta Stec, 'Publishing and Canonicity: The Case of Heinemann's "African Writers Series"', p. 143.

¹⁰⁰ Bejjit provides examples of the 'homogeneous mantle' adopted by Heinemann for the covers of AWS publications between 1962 and 1986 in 'The Publishing of African Literature', p. 52. Later examples are given on pp. 67 and 71.

¹⁰¹ Bejjit, 'The Publishing of African Literature', p. 52.

coloured B-format paperback covers.¹⁰² A poster to advertise the colourful, new-look African and Caribbean Writers Series, entitled 'New Worlds of Fiction', reinforced the significance of the new format, and the importance placed upon it its publishers:

In 1986 the best work from these series is to be made available in bright, 'B Format', trade covers. The first titles, together with some exciting new work, will be published in July, and more titles will follow in the autumn.

In the previous year, Keith Ponting had been instructed to re-design the covers of Heinemann's African Writers Series, Caribbean Writers Series and Arab Authors Series. The primary object of this exercise was to find a design concept that tied together all titles within the three series with a modern, intellectual and up-to-date image that would attract the serious and interested reader.¹⁰³ Significantly, the target market for the books in all three series was not Africa, the Caribbean or Arab countries, but a broader American and British market. Nor was it confined to specialist bookshops or to an intellectual readership. Heinemann planned to broaden its horizons.

Ponting was contracted via the Design Advisory Service Funded Consultancy Scheme. The objectives stated in the Terms of Reference of this Assisted Project were:

to produce a series of book covers for an African/Caribbean/Arabic backlist. Each book is to be treated individually within a new specially created imprint. By presenting each book as an interesting and intelligent piece of fiction [...] it is hoped that they will reach a wider audience.¹⁰⁴

Vicky Unwin oversaw the overall restyling of the Series in order to increase its appeal to UK and Western trade markets. The intention was to encourage booksellers to stock the new, considerably more attractive, AWS titles with a view to increasing sales. In this

¹⁰² B-format paperback publications measure 130mm x 198mm and are usually associated with literary authors and prestigious lists. Smaller, A-format paperback publications, 110mm x 178mm, are more commonly associated with the reasonably priced books that are accepted for sale by supermarkets, airports, railways stations and high street bookshops. Trade paperbacks, or C-format publications, are a similar size to most hardbacks, measuring 135mm x 216mm.

¹⁰³ Christine Archer to Keith Ponting, unpublished letter dated 19 November 1985. Heinemann Educational - HEB 39/2; HEB Archives, University of Reading.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

manner, Heinemann was hoping to emulate the likes of Penguin, Faber, Virago and the Women's Press; all of whom had already created distinctive and successful brand images, and who managed to achieve a high volume of paperback book sales.

As Unwin observed in the Editorial for the fourth volume of *Wasafiri*, the timing of this particular exercise (and that of similar efforts taking place at Longman in relation to their replacement of the Drumbeat Series with a Longman Caribbean Writers series) was hardly surprising:

1986 is going to be an important year for African and Caribbean writers.

First of all we have Caribbean Focus, which will culminate in a major literary conference at the Commonwealth Institute in October, and will be the first time that so many Caribbean and Black British writers can meet in one place. We also have the Commonwealth Writers Conference in Edinburgh, timed to coincide with the Commonwealth Games and the Commonwealth Arts Festival. [...] Is it, then more than a coincidence that two of the major publishing houses, who have built a reputation on the strength of their African and Caribbean publishing, have decided to give their respective series a facelift?¹⁰⁵

With these events in mind, 1986 did appear to be a potentially fortuitous one for African and Caribbean writers and their publishers, with both public and academic interest in the Commonwealth being relatively high. At the same time, Unwin acknowledged that the motivation for the rebranding exercises at Heinemann and Longman was, to a certain extent, economic, since both publishing houses had been affected by an economic slump in Africa as a result of the oil crisis and currency restrictions. Equally, both had previously experienced difficulties drawing attention to their African and Caribbean Writers Series in the UK. She concluded her editorial by stressing the commitment of each publisher to the publication of African and Caribbean literature, asserting that 'whatever the underlying

¹⁰⁵ Vicky Unwin, 'Editorial: New Directions in African and Caribbean Publishing', *Wasafiri*, 4 (Spring 1986), pp.2-3 (p. 2).

reasons for these new ventures the attendant publicity can only result in a higher profile for the authors involved and for African and Caribbean literature as a genre'.¹⁰⁶ Unwin's editorial reveals her personal commitment to the publication of African and Caribbean literature, and provides the reader with the sense of an escalating academic and general interest in writers and writing from the Commonwealth. As she implies, this interest would have been a significant contributing factor in any decisions made by educational publishers to launch new and reprinted titles by Commonwealth writers.

Unfortunately, Heinemann's expectations for this particular restyling exercise were not met and sufficient growth within the UK market was not satisfactorily achieved, and Unwin's optimistic assessment for the future of African and Caribbean literature published by British educational publishers was not entirely realised. Indeed, just a few years later, in 1988, the future of the AWS was in serious jeopardy. In a memo prepared for a board meeting to discuss the continuation of the Series in December 1988, Vicky Unwin put forward a case for maintaining the Series. This memo reveals how, at the end of the day, Heinemann was first and foremost an educational publisher; the proposals made by Unwin to boost the Series reflect this.¹⁰⁷ With regards to the selection of future titles for the AWS, Unwin proposed to enhance and to consolidate Heinemann's reputation as *the* publisher of African literature. She reiterated the importance of backlist titles and recognisable novelists whose names would ensure reviews. At the same time however, she maintained that the backlist would expire if new blood were not injected into the Series. Unwin's intentions are indicative of educational publishing strategies more generally. She sought to maintain the reputation of the Series by publishing a high standard of literature that included a variety of titles from new writers as well as new books by older writers, in addition to fail-safe backlist titles.

These strategies were reiterated in 1992 by Caroline Avens, Heinemann's Marketing Manager at the time, who also found it necessary to remind Heinemann's managers that, as

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁰⁷ Vicky Unwin, unpublished memo dated 21 November 1988. Heinemann Educational – HEB 56/2; HEB Archives, University of Reading.

niche publishers with a specialist market, links should be reinstated with the core academic market rather than chasing unrealised dreams of conquering the international general trade market. Avens stressed the need to build on the identity of the AWS list in order to reassert its dominance in the academic market.¹⁰⁸ Further memos and reports written throughout the 1980s and 1990s serve to demonstrate how Heinemann found it increasingly difficult to compete with the changing dynamics of the book industry, whilst at the same time losing out with their academic marketing.

In 1992/3 the African Writers Series underwent a second re-launch, incorporating another new look and the publication of new titles. This re-launch coincided with the thirtieth anniversary of the Series, and was accompanied by articles in the general, academic and trade press.¹⁰⁹ In a 1993 *British Book News* article, Caroline Avens elaborated upon Heinemann's strategy and explained why the publisher was aiming for a stronger identity for the African Writers Series:

We want the books to be easily identifiable to our readership. We are trying to use African artists' work on the covers, and have a more uniform series look. Also, we intend to change our publishing so that the new books fall into groups that are much easier to promote.¹¹⁰

This re-launch was more successful than the previous one. By 1993 the African Writers Series was once again publishing a steady number of new titles each year – up to fifteen from six per year in the preceding decade – and had over 200 titles in print. The AWS re-launch also coincided with the unveiling of an Arts Council sponsored Asian Writers Series, the launch of which was described as 'a significant publishing event' by Charles Sarvan in a 1995 review for *Wasafiri*,¹¹¹ and with the expansion of the Caribbean Writers

¹⁰⁸ Caroline Avens, unpublished memo dated 4 June 1992. Heinemann Educational - HEB 56/2; HEB Archives, University of Reading, HEB Archives.

¹⁰⁹ See for example Sarah Wheeler, 'Success by Series', *British Book News* (September 1993), pp. 566-567; Innes, '30 Years of African Publishing'; and Jenny Uglow, 'A voice out of Africa', *The Independent*, 3 January 1993, *The Sunday Review*, p. 20.

¹¹⁰ Avens quoted in Wheeler, 'Success by Series', p. 566.

¹¹¹ Charles Sarvan, 'The Heinemann Asian Writers Series', *Wasafiri*, 21 (Spring 1995), p. 70.

Series. Each Series had its own distinctive livery, matching the other two Series but with different bands of colour at the top of the cover panels: ochre for Africa, green for Asia and azure for the Caribbean.¹¹²

As part of the 1994 re-launch of the African Writers Series, Heinemann actively promoted a number of books by the black British writer, Buchi Emecheta, including her latest novel, *Kehinde* (1994) and several of her previous books (made possible after the rights to her works reverted from her existing paperback publisher).¹¹³ Emecheta was one of only a handful of black women writers in Britain published during the 1970s. By 1994, however, she had established for herself a reputation as an internationally successful author whose books maintained a position within various categories of Literature – British, black British, African, Nigerian, Postcolonial and Women's/Feminist to name a few – and as such might have significant market potential. So it was that, in March 1994, *Second Class Citizen*, *In the Ditch*, *Gwendolen*, *Joys of Motherhood*, *Destination Biafra*, and *Head Above Water* were re-launched in Heinemann's African Writers Series; *The Bride Price* and *Slave Girl* were republished later, in 1995. Publication files for the re-launch of each of these titles contain publishing proposals, profit and loss accounts, copies of contracts, production correspondence, and cover art for each, and various memos and faxes related to the cover illustration for each book.¹¹⁴

These files provide evidence of Heinemann's marketing strategy at this time. The 'uniform series look' referred to by Avens was actively incorporated into the Emecheta re-launch. In this instance, Heinemann employed the talents of internationally-renowned artist, Synthia Saint James, to design the covers of all of Emecheta's books. This fact alone serves to demonstrate how consistency of style, in addition to vibrancy and quality, was particularly important to Heinemann at this time. A further marketing tactic employed by

¹¹² Wheeler, 'Success by Series', p. 567.

¹¹³ Buchi Emecheta, *Kehinde* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1994).

¹¹⁴ Publication files for *Second Class Citizen* (HEB 35/7), *In the Ditch* (HEB 35/5), *Bride Price* (HEB 32/1), *Slave Girl* (HEB 33/11), *Joys of Motherhood* (HEB 27/2) and the reissue of *Joys of Motherhood* (36/7), *Kehinde* (HEB 35/10), *Destination Biafra* (HEB 35/9), *Head Above Water* (HEB 35/8) are held in the HEB Archives, University of Reading.

Heinemann during the re-launch of Emecheta's books within the AWS was the use of individual authors to promote their own work. Advance publicity material for each republication stresses Emecheta's availability for signings, readings and other literary events, a tactic which drew upon the author's ability for self-promotion.

There is plenty of evidence, both here and elsewhere, in Bejjit's thesis for example, that Heinemann made repeated efforts to penetrate the UK market by aiming new marketing and promotional campaigns at readers with an established interest in African literature and at new readers with more general interests. Yet the same evidence also reveals Heinemann's conflicting hopes and aspirations for the African Writers Series. On the one hand, the Series had established a strong presence in the academic market, a market which, it was maintained by Heinemann's marketing manager, should be expanded by automatically sending all new books to the publisher's list of top African studies academics in order to garner feedback on new titles, to obtain review quotes, and to get an indication of which books might feature on student reading lists: in other words, to gather intelligence about its core market.¹¹⁵ Yet throughout the 1980s and 1990s a reliance on academic markets and on backlist sales of established titles for use in schools, colleges and universities was not always deemed sufficient. Between the mid-1980s and mid-1990s Heinemann tried repeatedly to establish a market presence that could compete with mainstream paperback publications by the likes of Picador and Penguin. It sought to do this through the redesign of the covers of AWS titles and with active trade promotions. A degree of success was achieved, but at times this was at the expense of the Series' specialist reputation.

Heinemann found it increasingly difficult to reconcile its hopes and aspirations for both academic and general trade success with the African Writers Series. After a sales peak of £220,000 in 1992 (the thirtieth anniversary of the Series), AWS sales began a year on year decline. This prompted new proposals to streamline the list, primarily by including clearly definable African books that would be best sold by specialists into niche markets.

¹¹⁵ Caroline Avens, unpublished memo dated 4 June 1992. Heinemann Educational - HEB 56/2; HEB Archives, University of Reading, HEB Archives.

By 2002, on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of the African Writers Series, only 70 out of some 400 titles were still in print and no new titles were being commissioned.

For a period of time Heinemann's African Writers Series was highly successful. It was perhaps the most familiar of all the comparable educational series bought out in the 1960s and 1970s. Other publishers actively operating in African, Caribbean and Asian markets at the same time included Longman, Macmillan, Oxford University Press and Nelson. The focus of these publishers' activities was primarily the domestic market for school textbooks and literature. Longman, for instance, moved into African and Caribbean publishing as a direct response to the rapidly expanding markets for educational books in nations with inadequate publishing infrastructures of their own. In the grip of anti-colonial fervour these countries sought to link their educational syllabuses to their national history, geography and literature: essentially, to indigenise them. This opened up seemingly limitless possibilities for UK-based multinational educational publishers to exploit.

Anne Walmsley's appointment as Caribbean Publisher for Longman in 1966 (alongside that of Freya Watkinson for Nelson and Bill Lennox for Macmillan) was the first example of this particular publisher employing someone solely with a brief to build up a Caribbean list. Walmsley eventually moved from London to the Caribbean and was given the remit of publishing material intended specifically for this region.¹¹⁶ Alongside changes made to the education system in Jamaica, Longman's publishing in this region was boosted by a seismic shift in ministerial attitudes towards the use of local dialect in literary publications for use in schools. This practice had previously been forbidden as Creole had been considered unsuitable for serious study. The change in attitude resulted in increased flexibility for publishers and educators. It enabled Caribbean publishers like Anne Walmsley to publish some West Indian fiction for both the local and British markets. As well as publishing her own anthology of West Indian literature for use in schools, *The Sun's Eye* (1967),¹¹⁷ Walmsley also published and republished some fiction by Caribbean

¹¹⁶ Sue Bradley, *NLSC Book Trade Lives: Anne Walmsley 1931-*, Rec 4 August, (2003).

¹¹⁷ Anne Walmsley, *The Sun's Eye* (Port of Spain, Kingston: Longman Caribbean Limited, 1968).

writers domiciled in London during the 1960s and 1970s. Writing in 1995 about her early involvement with the republication of Sam Selvon's fiction, for instance, she recounted how

in the late 1960s, he rang me at Longmans where I was now Caribbean editor: might we be interested in republishing some of his early books? [...] So it was that in 1971, 1972 and 1973 *A Brighter Sun*, *The Lonely Londoners* and *Ways of Sunlight* reappeared in their first Longman editions and began to reach an ever-growing readership, in the Caribbean and Britain.¹¹⁸

Longman went on to publish *Moses Migrating* in 1983 (the second novel in the 'Moses trilogy', *Moses Ascending*, having been first published by Davis-Poynter in 1975).¹¹⁹

It is important to reiterate that Longman's publication of fiction by West Indian writers was consistently aimed at the Caribbean schools market. Any additional sales made in UK were simply accepted as a positive spin-off. One result of this was that the publication of *Moses Migrating* received little critical recognition in Britain, much to Selvon's chagrin. Letters exchanged between Anne Walmsley and Sam Selvon throughout the 1980s bear witness to Selvon's frustration about the lack of critical response to this novel. In a letter dated 27 December 1984 Selvon asserts that *Moses Ascending* had received a most favourable reception, being the subject of five critical reviews; in contrast *Moses Migrating* 'did not get a single line or word from the English press'.¹²⁰ One reason for this might be attributed to the fact that, unlike their mainstream counterparts, educational publishers like Longman did not utilise nor rely upon the book reviewing media in order to generate criticism, publicity and sales, usually relying on guaranteed schools markets instead.

¹¹⁸ Anne Walmsley, 'Sam Selvon: Gifts', *Kunapipi*, 17, no. 1 (1995), pp. 76-77 (p. 77).

¹¹⁹ Sam Selvon subsequently became one of the most distinguished twentieth-century writers taught in Britain. His novel, *The Lonely Londoners*, was first published by Allan Wingate in 1956. It was published as a Penguin Classic in 2006 and given out free with *The Times* newspaper in 2009 as an example of a book that people should read as model of contemporary writing.

¹²⁰ Sam Selvon to Anne Walmsley, unpublished letter dated 27 December 1984. Anne Walmsley Archive (Caribbean Literature), Sussex University Library Special Collections.

Nevertheless this spin-off effect – however small – was crucial: it kept in print some black writers and writing at a time when they were not actively supported by mainstream publishers. As Lyn Innes recounted during an interview in 2006, during the early period, in the 1950s and 1960s, in addition to the likes of Andre Deutsch and Faber,

Heinemann, Longman, Macmillan, Nelson all had publishing houses in Nigeria and in East Africa. The African Writers Series had to do with reaching a new market out there [but] it meant also they were publishing here [in Britain].¹²¹

During the same conversation, she describes how later on:

[...] in the late 70s/80s, quite a lot of anthologies [of black writers and writing] also got put together, anthologies particularly designed for schools [...] Anne Walmsley's [*The Sun's Eye*] for instance was primarily produced for the Caribbean market, but once they were published by British publishers here it was easier to get them adopted here as well.

In *The Sun's Eye* Walmsley bought together a selection of stories and poems by West Indian authors writing in the 1960s. Contributors to her anthology included, amongst others, Sam Selvon, George Lamming, Roger Mais and Andrew Salkey. Anthologies are a useful means by which a range of material might be collected into a single volume for publication. Indeed when the African Writers Series was founded in 1962 it targeted the local schools market with anthologies and reprints of notable African works. Early examples of anthologies published in the AWS include, *Modern African Prose*, compiled by Richard Rive, published in 1964 and David Cook's *Origin East Africa: a Makerere Anthology* (1969). Above all though, series like the AWS, which went on to criss-cross academic and general markets, kept interest in new and innovative literary voices from Britain's ex-colonies alive. Crucially, this provided a platform for the future publication of black British writers.

¹²¹ Professor Lyn Innes in conversation with Philippa Ireland, 7 July 2006.

Chapter Four

MULTICULTURAL LIBRARIANSHIP AND BLACK BRITISH PUBLISHING

The arrival of large numbers of immigrants from Britain's colonies in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s presented a particular challenge to public librarians, in how best to address the needs of an increasingly multicultural population. Despite identifying, quite early on, the existence of new groups of library clients with specific resource needs, progress in developing library services that reflected contemporary British society was nevertheless slow. Indeed, this challenge was not effectively tackled until some three decades after the first wave of post-war migrants settled in Britain. Lack of both supply and demand can be blamed for some of the delays in developing a library service that catered specifically for black people in Britain. In the case of early Afro-Caribbean immigrants, they were not seen to be at a disadvantage resulting from any obvious language barrier, and as a consequence no vernacular language provision was deemed necessary. On the whole, readers from the Afro-Caribbean community in Britain were expected to assume the habits of existing library service users. In actual fact, these same readers placed few demands upon the service, having either no need for it or low expectations of what it might be able to offer them. In their oft-cited paper, 'Myth or Reality?', which exposed the limitations of the multicultural library service in Britain in the early 1980s and the extent to which it paid tokenistic lip service to the notion of multiculturalism, Jaswinder Gundara and Ronald Warwick stated that: 'many black people have become habituated to the idea that libraries are there only to serve the needs of the white community. It is going to take more than a few shelves of "appropriate" books to convince them otherwise'.¹ Contemporaneously,

¹ Jaswinder Gundara, and Ronald Warwick, 'Myth or Reality?' *Assistant Librarian*, 74, no. 5 (1981), pp. 67-73 (p. 72).

Ziggi Alexander declared that 'in most instances, Black communities do not hold high expectations of library provision'.²

The need for an appropriate and adequate library service for the black community in Britain was, in fact, first identified in the mid-1970s. W.J. Martin's collection of papers, *Library Services to the Disadvantaged* (1975),³ drew attention to libraries' social responsibility to offer a service to what he described as 'the disadvantaged', by which it meant the sick and incapacitated, the poor, and large numbers of (black) immigrants living in predominantly urban areas.⁴ This publication was followed by nearly three decades of published research and investigation into library provision for ethnic minorities in Britain. The result was a profusion of meetings and conferences, and the publication of an array of reports, handbooks, policy statements, service guidelines and strategy documents.⁵

Initially, much of this research was concerned with the supply of mother-tongue materials and with building relationships between the library and ethnic minority communities. Later, the vast majority of research in this area concentrated on the development of a library service that reflected the inclusive and diverse nature of British society as a whole. This was in accordance with the change in tenor of contemporary multicultural ideology, and resulted in calls for a more pluralist approach to be adopted in relation to library service provision.

² Ziggi Alexander, *Library Services and Afro-Caribbean Communities* (London: Association of Assistant Librarians, 1982), p. 14.

³ W. J. Martin, *Library Services to the Disadvantaged* (London: Bingley, 1975).

⁴ At this point 'immigrant' and 'black' were used interchangeably within the library service. The term immigrant was often prefixed by 'Commonwealth'. These labels were superseded by the designation 'ethnic minority', and later by the term 'multicultural'. The use of the label 'Afro-Caribbean' also became commonplace, referring specifically to first-, second- and third-generation black people in Britain. All of these terms will be used throughout this chapter within the context that they were first employed.

⁵ A selection of relevant reports published during the period includes: Madeleine Cooke, *Public library provision for ethnic minorities in the United Kingdom: the report of an investigation carried out on behalf of the British National Bibliography Research Fund, between January-May 1979* (1979); Ziggi Alexander, *Library Services and Afro-Caribbean Communities*; Ziggi Alexander and Trevor Knight, *The Whole Library Movement: changing practice in multi-cultural librarianship* (London: Association of Assistant Librarians, 1992); Suman Datta and Sylva Simsova, *Cultural Diversity and Libraries: today & tomorrow* (London: PNL Press, 1989); and Anthony Olden, Ching-Ping Tseng, and Alli A S Mcharazo, *Service for All? A review of the published literature on black and ethnic minority/multicultural provision by public libraries in the United Kingdom* (London: British Library Research and Development Department, 1996).

However, the collective impact of this research was neither universal nor significant. Pirkko Elliott reflected in 1999 that, in spite of being carried out and published in very different political and cultural climates, similar conclusions were drawn and recommendations made in all three of the major research reports published between 1978 and 1998.⁶ Two further publications that sought to offer practical advice for librarians, both published within a decade of each other and edited by Ziggy Alexander, reveal the limited extent to which multicultural librarianship developed between the 1980s and the 1990s. In 1982, Alexander published a handbook for non-specialist staff in public libraries, entitled *Library Services and Afro-Caribbean Communities*. Its publication came shortly after the Brixton Riots took place in 1981, and racial tensions in Britain had come to a head. The tone of this handbook reflected the mood of the time. In it, Alexander argued that it was necessary for multicultural librarianship to develop in order to provide the cultural, educational and information support which a politicised black community needed to survive in a hostile white society.⁷ She stressed the multicultural nature of British society and bemoaned the fact that existing literature provision rarely reflected this reality.⁸ Ten years later, in 1992, Alexander and Trevor Knight co-edited a further book that assessed some of the tangible developments that had been made in multicultural librarianship and, once again, pointed the way forward for the profession.⁹ Alexander and Knight were able to offer examples of good practice drawn from library services across the country that were aimed at communities with very different local demographics. At the same time however, the editors acknowledged that there was still scope for criticism of the

⁶ See Pirkko Elliott, 'Research into public libraries and ethnic minority communities in the UK, from Clough and Quarmby to Roach and Morrison: a review article', *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, 31, no. 3 (1999), pp. 174-177 (p. 174). Elliot looked specifically at the following research: Eric Clough and Jacqueline Quarmby, *A public library service for ethnic minorities in Great Britain* (London: Library Association, 1978); Pirkko Elliott, *Public libraries and self-help ethnic minority organisations: a study of the relationship between public libraries, advice / information services and libraries, bookshops and publishers set up by self-help ethnic minority groups* (London, School of Librarianship and Information Studies, Polytechnic of North London, 1984); Patrick Roach and Marlene Morrison, *Public Libraries, Ethnic Diversity and Citizenship* (London, British Library Board, 1998).

⁷ Alexander, *Library Services and Afro-Caribbean Communities*, p. 6.

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 13.

⁹ Alexander and Knight, *The Whole Library Movement: changing practice in multi-cultural librarianship*.

current level and range of public library services. They emphasised the personal commitment to multicultural librarianship that was necessary to ensure its success, and highlighted the patchy implementation of multicultural librarianship to date. Significantly, attention was also drawn to the fact that this form of librarianship was at serious risk from a reduction in government funding.

Prior to 1992 special grants could be obtained through Section 11 of the Local Government Act 1966 (to be referred to from this point onwards as Section 11) and the Urban Programme under the Local Government Grant (Social Need) Act 1969. The latter invited grant applications from local authorities for capital and non-capital projects in areas of 'special social need': towns and cities containing large numbers of 'disadvantaged' people experiencing urban deprivation. It was soon identified that it was in many of these areas that there were 'substantial ethnic minorities'.¹⁰ In cases where grant applications were successful, local authority expenditure was 75% grant-aided, leaving the net cost of 25% to be met by the local authority. Initiating projects serving ethnic minorities was just one of the areas under which applications for Urban Programme assistance might be submitted. In contrast, Section 11 related specifically to meeting the needs of immigrant communities. It provided for monetary assistance to be awarded to those local authorities with a substantial number of immigrants from Commonwealth countries. Under Section 11, local authorities were able to claim a 75% grant towards expenditure on staff that were required to make special provision for this particular group of immigrants.¹¹ The local authority was responsible for meeting the remaining 25% of the cost of the salaries and wages of such staff.

¹⁰ Clough and Quarmby, *A Public Library Service for Ethnic Minorities in Great Britain*, p. 265.

¹¹ According to Clough and Quarmby, originally, the Act specified that those local authorities eligible to apply for a grant must have 2% or more Commonwealth immigrants on the school roll. Restrictions were also placed on the length of time that the Commonwealth citizens had lived in Britain; initially this was set at less than 10 years. Revisions of the Act were made in 1982 to include all Commonwealth citizens, regardless of their time resident in Britain. In addition, some local authorities were given a *prima facie* case for claiming a grant; these included Birmingham, Leeds and certain Greater London boroughs. Clough and Quarmby stated that the total number of such local authorities was 88. See Clough and Quarmby, *A public library service for ethnic minorities in Great Britain*, pp. 264-265.

Before 1992, government funding under Section 11 was open-ended, permitting the continued employment of staff to fill specialist posts. After April 1992, new criteria were imposed for time-limited projects replacing the existing unrestricted system of funding. The very real threat that these changes in criteria posed for public library services for black and ethnic minority groups generated a considerable degree of speculation, debate and consternation in the professional press from 1990 onwards.¹² Specific concerns were raised about the potential for services to these groups to be reduced or to cease completely. Of particular concern were those local authorities that had adopted a separate development approach to specialist library provision, and those that relied upon Section 11 money alone in order to fund services specifically for Commonwealth immigrants and their families, rather than incorporating them into the mainstream library service. It was argued that the children of Commonwealth immigrants in particular – those who had been born and grown up in Britain and who, fundamentally, were either pupils in British schools or were already British tax payers – were entitled to a service that was provided through mainstream channels: not as an added extra via specialist funding that could and would be removed in times of economic restriction.

These concerns were not new. A decade earlier, Jaswinder Gundara and Ronald Warwick had made known their own reservations about the provision and use of separate funding to appoint library staff to deal with ethnic minority services, arguing that this would perpetuate the development of distinct, specialist provision for disadvantaged members of the community.¹³ In 1981, Gundara and Warwick had appeared particularly concerned that by deeming the black community as disadvantaged, this community would become an object of philanthropic concern. They warned that 'such concern is unlikely to

¹² See for example: Margaret Kendall, 'Section 11 Changes in Funding Criteria: the implications for public library services for black and minority ethnic groups', *Public Library Journal*, 7, no. 2 (1992), pp. 37-40; Christina Brockhurst, 'Ethnic Plans Face Uncertain Cash Future', *Library Association Record*, 95, no. 1 (1993), pp. 16-17; Nicola Matthews and Vincent Roper, 'Section 11 Funding: Its Changes and Implications for Library Provision for Ethnic Minority Communities', *Library Management*, 15, no. 3 (1994), pp. 5-13 (this article also cites Neville Price, 'What Price Section 11: The Demise of the Ethnic Librarian?', *Library Association Record*, 91, no. 11 (1989), p. 652; E. Hill, V. Thompson and C. Woodley, 'Section 11: An Open Letter from the African-Caribbean Library Association', *Assistant Librarian*, 85, no. 2 (1992), pp. 20-21; and Christina Brockhurst, 'Catch 22 and Section 11', *Library Association Record*, 94, no. 5 (1992), p. 299.

¹³ Gundara and Warwick, 'Myth or Reality?', p. 69.

survive adverse economic conditions, and already there are signs that “services to ethnic minorities” are regarded as expendable’.¹⁴ A decade on, their fears were realised as changes to Section 11 funding criteria placed some services in danger of being cut.

Section 11 funding was specifically intended for the employment of library staff with special responsibility for ethnic minority service provision. These librarians often acted as an intermediary between the members of the community and the local public library. The varied nature of their role impacted upon the development of a library’s relationship with both the wider community and the minority book trade. This was most keenly felt in urban areas where there were greater numbers of people from ethnic minority backgrounds, and out of which the majority of specialist independent book publishers and sellers operated.¹⁵ The public library service in Birmingham, for instance, was at the forefront of multicultural librarianship; so too were libraries in some of the London Boroughs including Brent, Hackney, Sutton and Wandsworth. Specific projects that enabled ethnic minorities to make effective use of library services were also initiated in Leicestershire, Manchester and Liverpool. In all of these areas, multicultural librarianship involved more than just putting a few books in foreign languages on shelves. Rather, it was about materials selection, staffing and staff training, having a range of language skills available and a broad understanding of different cultures, improving the promotion of library services to ethnic minority communities, and developing outreach services to the community.¹⁶

The position of specialist librarian with responsibility for ethnic minority provision grew out of the role of the outreach or ‘community librarian’ that had come to prominence in the 1970s. Verena Thompson elaborated upon the similarities between the two roles in an article appropriately entitled, ‘What a lot I’ve got: the work of the Community Librarian’:

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ See Trevor Knight, ‘Multicultural Library Services in the London Borough of Sutton’ and Gloria Lock, ‘Library Services to the African and Caribbean Communities’, both in Alexander and Knight, *The Whole Library Movement: changing practice in multi-cultural librarianship*; and Brockhurst, ‘Ethnic Plans Face Uncertain Cash Future’.

¹⁶ Brian Hall, ‘Professional Education for Multicultural Librarianship’, *IFLA Library Services to Multicultural Populations Newsletter*, 3 (December 2005), pp. 12-13.

No matter the title of the post or the library, one part of the job description remains the same – to assess the need for, devise ways of implementing, provide services to members of the community from a particular *racial* group.¹⁷ (my emphasis)

The task facing the specialist librarian for ‘a particular racial group’ appears to have been considerable. Unlike the mainstream library service, which employed staff with responsibility for specific aspects of the service (purchasing, cataloguing, marketing, outreach and so on), the community librarian’s job entailed a variety of functions: training, responsibility for buying all specialist materials on the library’s behalf, budgetary control, cataloguing, working with the defined user group, arranging, holding and participating in talks and events for the community, user education, and the publication of directories, bibliographies, newsletters and similar materials. Aside from the enormity of this task, difficulties were encountered by librarians working in this field who often found it hard to keep up to date with the availability of relevant materials. Contemporary sources of this kind of information like the British National Bibliography (BNB), which records the publishing activity of the UK and Republic of Ireland, and the trade magazine, *The Bookseller*, rarely covered materials from small or independent, specialist publishers.¹⁸

Nevertheless, librarians with particular responsibility for services to ethnic minority communities played an active and vital role in building relationships between the public library service and the entire community, from specialist supplier to end user. They were assisted in this by the Library Association and related organisations, who arranged workshops and conferences at which race and library provision in a multicultural society were the theme and where examples of best practice in multicultural librarianship could be provided. Examples of these events include a workshop laid on by the Polytechnic of North London in 1973 entitled ‘Public Library and the Needs of the Immigrant; a three-day

¹⁷ Verena Thompson, ‘What a lot I’ve got: the work of the Community Librarian’, *New Library World*, 87, no. 1032 (1986), pp. 110-111 (p. 110).

¹⁸ In a report for the British National Bibliography Research Fund, *Access to Ethnic Minority Materials* (1986), Pirkko Elliott surmised that less than 50% of UK produced ethnic minority materials were covered by the BNB.

conference at London University in 1981; two conferences in 1984: 'Libraries and Race – some major issues', a two-day post-conference seminar organised by the Community Services Group of the Library Association in Brighton, and 'Reflecting Society: library provision in a multicultural society', a weekend school organised by the Youth Libraries Groups of the Library Association in Swansea; and a one-day seminar on 'Libraries and the Afro-Caribbean community' held in 1987 at Loughborough. Information about the location of sources of material specifically for ethnic minorities was also provided in journals and in publications like Elliot's *Access to Ethnic Minority Materials* and *The Whole Library Movement: changing practice in multi-cultural librarianship*.¹⁹ Other useful sources of information were magazines like *Wasafiri*, which carried reviews of relevant literature and a books received section.

Librarians often worked with specialist book suppliers and local community bookshops in order to meet their specific resource needs. Staff and volunteers at the bookshops, like Sarah White at the New Beacon Bookshop in North London and Jessica Huntley at the Walter Rodney Bookshop in West London, were regularly called upon by librarians to offer advice on book selection and procurement in order to improve library provision. In the absence of national coverage of relevant developments taking place within the specialist book industry, publishers and booksellers like White and Huntley were invaluable sources of information about new and existing titles. As per the norm, both produced bookshop catalogues and lists of books in print that were used extensively by librarians when selecting their stock. Items might then be acquired direct from specialist bookshops through book approval lists, and stock approval meetings were frequently held in these stores.²⁰ The stock acquired in this way included dual language books, books portraying positive black characters, and information books portraying daily life in

¹⁹ An example of a particularly useful journal article is Neville Price, 'Bookshops in London for Minority Publications', *Journal of Multicultural Librarianship*, 3, no. 3 (1989), pp. 112-115. In addition, in *The Whole Library Movement: changing practice in multi-cultural librarianship* Alexander and Knight provided a comprehensive list of Community Bookshops.

²⁰ For an example of successful liaison between libraries and the specialist book trade, see Shiraz Durrani, John Pateman and Naila Durrani, 'The Black and Minority Ethnic Stock Group (BSG) in Hackney libraries', *Library Review*, 48, no. 1 (1999), pp. 18-24.

multicultural Britain. With the guidance and support of specialist publishers-cum-booksellers and community groups, it was possible for specialist librarians to direct service provision to suit the precise needs of a specific community group.

The relationship between local librarians and specialist booksellers foundered when the latter found themselves unable to accommodate changes taking place within the wider library supply service. Historically, specialist publishers, booksellers and distributors had become accustomed to functioning on the fringes of library supply. They operated a basic system that might involve the sending of inspection copies on a monthly basis to libraries, meeting with librarians at books fairs and at bookshops, and supplying books on a relatively casual basis. This changed when structures for library supply were put in place that made it difficult for some bookshops to continue to supply books in this way. For example, the black interest book publisher, Bogle L'Ouverture, began to experience difficulties when it was demanded that they provide jackets on all their books, because that was what the bigger library suppliers did. The financial implications of this meant that it was impossible to meet these demands.²¹ A reduction in library budgets and buying power, and later plans to modernise the library service in order to increase its efficiency, meant that small booksellers and publishers continually found themselves lacking the resources required to meet increased demands of the library supply business. Added to which, by the end of the 1990s, the library supply business was dominated by five suppliers accounting for approximately 65% of public library acquisitions.²² The fact that control of the library supply business came to rest in the hands of a small number of suppliers had the inevitable effect of undermining the already fragile relationship public libraries had with small, independent booksellers.

Section 11 funding in its original form was used by public libraries to build up specialist library services.²³ This helped to foster a relatively straightforward and mutually

²¹ Philippa Ireland, 'Conversation with Eric and Jessica Huntley', recorded 9 January 2007. See Appendix 3, below, pp. 240-246.

²² Fishwick et al. (1998) quoted in Lindsey Muir, 'Library supply: an extended view of competition', *New Library World*, 100, no. 4 (1999), pp. 165-172 (p. 166).

²³ Other sources of funding that was utilised in this way include City Challenge and the Public Library Development Incentive Scheme.

beneficial relationship between the public library and the community it served. This relationship was placed in jeopardy when changes to Section 11 funding criteria that were introduced in 1990 were brought into effect in 1992.²⁴ In addition to the concerns raised regarding these changes, as previously outlined, in 1998 Roach and Morrison recognised the possibility that ‘the resource pressures on the public library service coupled with current uncertainty regarding the loss of special funds may present further challenges to ethnic minority engagement and inclusion’.²⁵ The impact of this was felt by the black book trade, which saw a dramatic decline in funds made available for black material, and in the wider community, which saw a decline in the quality and quantity of service provision.²⁶

In terms of the effect upon the black book trade, Sarah White has described how changes in government funding had a direct impact upon one of New Beacon’s primary markets. Prior to these changes, libraries were a major purchaser of New Beacon titles and other material supplied by the New Beacon Book store throughout the 1980s. It was, as Sarah White described, something of a bonanza for small bookshops like New Beacon.²⁷ In the wake of the racial disturbances that took place at the start of the decade, government money was pumped into ethnic minority service provision following its recognition of the permanent presence of black people in British society. Thus, publishers and suppliers of black interest material benefited from an upsurge in demand for books, and from an increase in money available to libraries to purchase these books. A second key market for New Beacon at this time was comprised mainly of pupils at local schools and universities. Both have since experienced a palpable decline. As White described:

I think that students are feeling the pinch. The university course that we had the most direct relations with [now has] fewer students. There would be a

²⁴ See Matthews and Roper, ‘Section 11 Funding: Its Changes and Implications for Library Provision for Ethnic Minority Communities’ for more detail about changes to Section 11 funding criteria.

²⁵ Roach and Morrison, *Public Libraries, Ethnic Diversity and Citizenship*, Key Finding Number 8.

²⁶ Durrani, Pateman and Durrani, ‘The Black and Minority Ethnic Stock Group (BSG) in Hackney libraries’, p. 18.

²⁷ Philippa Ireland, ‘Conversation with Sarah White’, recorded 10 August 2006. See Appendix 2, below, pp. 232-239.

time when students would pile into the bookshop to get their books in the autumn. It's much more in ones and twos now.²⁸

White also elaborated upon the influence of the library service upon New Beacon's publishing operations. For nearly thirty years, New Beacon produced books in both hardback and paperback formats. Normal procedure throughout publishing was to do the hardback edition first, both for the libraries and, more in the case of the mainstream industry, for reviews since reviewing editors tended not to review original paperbacks.²⁹ Added to which, producing both formats kept the price of the latter lower. As the purchasing habits of libraries changed, it seemed no longer sensible to produce the slightly more expensive edition, as the subsidy element of the two format publishing process was no longer effective. By the end of the 1990s libraries were tending to buy more and more paperback books than hardback. As a result, the majority of New Beacon's publications came to be printed just in paperback. Recent analysis of public library purchasing trends confirms this general decline in hardback versus paperback purchases: 'in public libraries, the proportion of hardbacks stood at between 48 to 50 percent in the late 1980s, then fell to 44 percent in 1998'.³⁰

Clearly, some of the trends taking place within the library service and the wider book industry over the course of the period had a very real impact upon the activities of specialist independent publishers like New Beacon and Bogle L'Ouverture, both in terms of the manner in which books were published and the markets in which they were sold. These developments may well have had negative results for many small independent book publishers, but from the perspective of the library service the effect in some instances was quite different. The restrictions placed upon the special funding available to public libraries forced some of them to move their specialist provision into the mainstream, reflecting a

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Philippa Ireland, 'Conversation with Margaret Busby', recorded 25 May 2006. See Appendix 1, below, pp. 225-231.

³⁰ Ann Chapman, Claire Creaser and David Spiller, 'Trends in monograph acquisitions in UK libraries', *Library Management*, 21, no. 6 (2000), pp. 307-315 (p. 307).

wider social agenda to reduce racial disadvantage and to recognise the culturally diverse nature of British society.

Even before changes to Section 11 funding criteria, the library profession had recognised two key things. Firstly, the heterogeneous nature of the black readership; secondly, that the older generation of black immigrants, who had previously made only limited use of the library service, were no longer the only readers from the Afro-Caribbean community that required specialist provision. In 1988, Gloria Lock posed the question: 'Who then, for the purposes of service provision are Afro-Caribbeans?' In answer to her own question, she described this particular client group as 'one that is primarily made up of black people who are at a disadvantage because of racial and cultural discrimination. [... It was] now made up of three generations: two born and bred in the UK, and a third which grew up in the Caribbean and which has grown old here'.³¹ Interestingly, Lock's definition is an early example of how development of the label 'black' was beginning to map an Afro-Caribbean course, as discussed in the Introduction.

One of the many outcomes of the race riots of the early 1980s has been shown to be an increased demand for books – for information about the black people who were making their permanent home in Britain. As Eric Huntley noted,

there's nothing like a revolutionary upsurge to create demand because people want to know. There is a demand for knowledge and for information: who were these black people, where are they from, what are their aspirations? [...] It was a good time for bookselling.³²

Later in the decade, it became apparent that, by asserting their rights and by making demands upon public services, second and third generation black Britons presented a fresh challenge to the library service, and to the book industry as a whole. As Gloria Lock explained,

³¹ Gloria Lock, 'Libraries and the Afro-Caribbeans: the way forward', *Journal of Multicultural Librarianship*, 2, no. 2 (1988), pp. 47-56 (p. 50).

³² Philippa Ireland, 'Conversation with Eric and Jessica Huntley', recorded 9 January 2007. See Appendix 3, below, pp. 240-246.

There is a growing demand for books, for children and teenagers, which feature British, or at least Western, experiences of settings involving black characters. Publications by Longmans, Macmillan, Nelson and Cambridge University Press and Bodley Head tend to portray only African or Caribbean culture and backgrounds. These are less relevant, and less popular, than the handful of books by Buchi Emecheta, Andrew Salkey and Rukshana Smith which deal with a British milieu, and even those by American writers such as Rosa Guy and Mildred Taylor.³³

Observations like this were also made elsewhere. Other library professionals writing at the time also commented on the demand for the provision of a new type of book in British libraries that reflected the black British experience. Madeline Cooke called for 'further research to identify the special needs of the British black community, as part of a coordinated programme of service developments throughout the United Kingdom'.³⁴

Writing in the journal, *Assistant Librarian*, publisher Margaret Busby argued that 'behind any genuine attempt to redress the balance must be the acceptance that immigrant communities in Britain are not a temporary phenomenon, but a permanent presence with a voice that should be listened to and adequately represented on the bookshelves of schools, shops and libraries'.³⁵ Jaswinder Gundara and Ronald Warwick stressed that 'it is essential for librarians to remember that we are no longer talking of 'immigrants'; we are talking of the needs of the Black British population', and argued that 'if librarians accord Black writers the recognition they deserve, readers will be more amenable to diversifying their reading habits'.³⁶

All of these comments were made between the late 1970s and mid-1980s, leading to the conclusion that the library service was perhaps one of the first institutions to identify, to categorise and to champion the literary requirements of black Britons. This was a

³³ Lock, 'Libraries and the Afro-Caribbeans: the way forward', p. 54.

³⁴ Cooke, *Public library provision for ethnic minorities in the United Kingdom*, p. 26.

³⁵ Margaret Busby, 'A Permanent Presence: Fiction from the Immigrant Communities', *Assistant Librarian*, 88, no. 8 (1984), pp. 104-108 (p. 108).

³⁶ Gundara and Warwick, 'Myth or Reality?', pp. 68, 72.

challenge that the service was unable to rise to for a number of years. As well as being hampered by alterations to Section 11 funding and changes within the library service that affected the supply of black interest books, the availability of published material that dealt with a specific black British experience was rather limited. Of the small number of black British novelists who were published at this time, Caryl Phillips is perhaps the best known. Others, not mentioned by Gloria Lock, include Abdulrazak Gurnah and Joan Riley. Interestingly, Gurnah has described how he began writing when in England, prompted by reflections about belonging and the country he left behind. He wrote almost secretly, a fact which explains why it took so long for his work to be published after he arrived in England. His first novel, *Memory of Departure* (1987) was published by the mainstream publishing house, Jonathan Cape, nearly twenty years after he moved to England from Zanzibar.³⁷ Cape also published *Pilgrims Way* (1988) and *Dottie* (1990). His later fiction was published by Hamish Hamilton and Bloomsbury. Chapter Six looks in some detail at the publication of two novels in particular that sought to reflect the life of black youths growing up in Britain during the mid 1970's to the mid 1980's, *Bad Friday* by Norman Smith (1985) and David Simon's *Railton Blues* (1983).

Links between writers, readers, publishers and libraries was fostered at events like the International Book Fair of Radical Black and Third World Books. A series of twelve Book Fairs took place between 1982 and 1995. These were a cultural manifestation of heightened black awareness. They acted as a means by which black cultural activity was exhibited, deliberated upon and celebrated. They took place at a particular moment in black British history when the politics of black representation transferred, from an emphasis on rights of access and the contestation of racism, to confronting notions of identity and the recognition of the heterogeneous nature of the category 'black'. At the same time they challenged the notion that the black community comprised a lawless, intimidating and threatening body of radical activists. Rather, the Book Fairs were a

³⁷ *Conversation: Caryl Phillips & Abdulrazak Gurnah, with Radhika Jones*, Recorded 28 April, (New York City, 2007). Available: <http://www.pcn.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/1355/prmID/1464> [14 December 2009].

peaceful exemplification of black creativity. In *A Meeting of the Continents: The International Book Fair of Radical Black and Third World Books – Revisited* (2005) the editors describe the space that the Book Fairs created for the expression of black cultural creativity:

These Fairs represent a significant period in the cultural and political history of Britain's black population: they operated as an interface between culture and politics and provided opportunities for cultural expression and discourse on local and international issues.³⁸

The first International Book Fair was founded by New Beacon Books, Bogle L'Ouverture and the *Race Today* Collective. The latter organisation grew out of a break away faction from the Institute of Race Relations (IRR) in the 1970s and put out a journal of the same name. Prior to the Fairs, these organisations had a shared a history of alliance. In 1975, John La Rose and other concerned parents had founded the Black Parents Movement. By then the *Race Today* Collective had broken away from the IRR. The Black Parents Movement allied with them and with the Black Youth Movement. This alliance became a powerful cultural and political movement, being the same alliance which formed the New Cross Massacre Action Committee in response to the arson attack which resulted in the deaths of 13 young blacks in 1981.³⁹

The Book Fairs have been described by Linton Kwesi Johnson as more than a marketplace where people could buy and sell books.⁴⁰ They were a place where culture and politics synthesised. The programme of events for each Book Fair timetabled a number of political forums and points of discussion concerning national and international issues. The first Fair, for example, included a forum on 'racist and fascist attacks on black, left-wing and community booksellers and other institutions in Britain', presented by Jessica Huntley. Subsequent forums covered the following themes: 'the resurgence of barbarism' (in 1983),

³⁸ Sarah White, Roxy Harris, and Sharmilla Beezmohun, *A Meeting of the Continents: The International Book Fair of Radical and Third World Books - Revisited* (New Beacon Books, 2005), p. 2.

³⁹ Linton Kwesi Johnson, 'John La Rose', *The Guardian*, 4 March 2006 Obituaries, p. 39.

⁴⁰ Alex Wheatle, 'A Conversation with Linton Kwesi Johnson', *Wasafiri*, 24, no. 3 (2009), pp. 35-41 (p. 36).

moderated by Darcus Howe; 'migrant struggles in Britain and Europe', 'the women's struggle: the way forward' and 'current struggles in the Caribbean & the way forward' (in 1984); and 'India: the crisis to come', 'black, radical and third world women and their current struggles', 'Caribbean in ferment' and 'Malcolm X and social liberation' (in 1985). This trend continued, with national and international political issues being tabled for discussion and debate at later Fairs.

Despite politics featuring heavily on the agenda at each Fair, they did not appeal to political radicals and activists alone. They were attended by people from both black and white communities – non-academics, school children, teachers, mainstream publishers, librarians and the general public.

In terms of the publishers who had bookstalls at and visited the Book Fairs between 1982 and 1995, these included the educational publishers Longman, Heinemann and Oxford University Press who, according to Patricia Haward, in 1986 put on 'their best show of all the novelists from Africa and the Caribbean [and] poets such as Soyinka, Brutus and Mapanje'.⁴¹ Also there that year were Virago and the Women's Press, publishers of Maya Angelou and Alice Walker respectively, who exhibited the work of these prominent black American women writers alongside lesser known black British writers, Grace Nicholls and Joan Riley. Verna Wilkins, managing director of Tamarind Books, a publisher of children's books and puzzles, recalls that from the moment that she first attended the Book Fair a year later, in 1987, she was delighted 'to find so many books from all over the world'.⁴² The Fair was, she remembers, 'a brisk and buoyant marketplace, full of atmosphere and excitement, discussion and celebration of black literature and talent'.⁴³ At the Book Fairs, Tamarind fitted in. It was a comfortable marketplace, unlike many other venues where books are sold and where Wilkins often felt like the odd one out. Wilkins's acknowledges that her publishing business was boosted by the Book Fairs,

⁴¹ White et al., *A Meeting of the Continents*, p 52.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p 69.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

which provided a platform for her to show her books and enabled her to meet other black publishers and to share experiences. As Margaret Busby tells us, the Book Fairs were also

places where you saw a kind of person engaging with literature who wouldn't have gone to a mainstream British bookstore. Black working-class people were not viewed as readers of literature by the British literary establishment and they were not treated as such: mainstream bookstores and publishers did not cater for their needs and did not make them feel welcome. At the book fairs, however, these people would be there in their hundreds, browsing and buying and meeting the authors.⁴⁴

Sarah White alluded to the positive response of the black community in Britain to this timely creation of a space in which they could celebrate their literature, films, music, performance, and art, when she recalled this community's 'tremendous enthusiasm for the first book fair'.⁴⁵ The enthusiasm of some of those who were regular attendees at the Fairs is evident in the memoirs provided early on in *A Meeting of the Continents*. Some of these memories have already been referred to. Others evoke the sense of camaraderie that enveloped the Fairs, and stress their significance as a focal point for literature, culture politics and teaching.

The reaction of the black community to the Fairs as described by White, and the fact that the Fairs in London spawned others in Leeds/Bradford, Glasgow and Manchester, can be seen as a form of collective defiance against the marginalisation of black culture by British society, and as further evidence of a growing readership for black interest books. As Verna Wilkins has described, the Book Fairs provided 'under one the one roof, [a] selection of literature that was not available in the shops in England'.⁴⁶ For the most part, in the 1980s and 1990s this readership was supplied, instead, by specialist independent publishers and booksellers like New Beacon Books and Bogle L'Ouverture, either direct

⁴⁴ In Brian Alleyne, *Radicals Against Race* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2002), p. 59.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ White et al., *A Meeting of the Continents*, p. 69.

through their own stores or via other community and specialist bookshops, and, most importantly for the purpose of this discussion, by public libraries.

Whilst the Book Fairs were run by volunteers on a not-for-profit basis, records held at the London Metropolitan Archives demonstrate the commercial value of the Book Fairs for exhibitors.⁴⁷ In 1984 alone Bogle L'Ouverture received orders from the following: the Priory Centre; Worpole Library; Luton Central Library; Marcus Garvey Centre, Nottingham; Plymouth Public Library; Manchester Public Library; Newham Common Renewal Programme; Melting Pot; Kingsbury Library in North West London; Ipswich Central Library; Wolverhampton Central Library; ACTAL; The Book Room in Birmingham; the Centre for Caribbean Studies; Alperton High School in Wembley; and Brent Library Service.⁴⁸ Significantly, fifty per cent of these clients were libraries from across the UK.

Thinking once more in terms of Darnton's model, in this chapter it has been shown how the development of multicultural librarianship influenced different agents – publishers, booksellers and readers – at various points around the black British book 'circuit'. Particular attention has been paid to the impact of the relationship between individual public libraries and the wider Afro-Caribbean community upon specialist publishers-cum-booksellers of African, Caribbean, Asian and black British literature. It is now possible to assert that multicultural librarianship played a key role in identifying, categorising and supplying the needs of a uniquely black British readership during the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s.

⁴⁷ The London Metropolitan Archives is the archive repository for many London-wide organisations. It is part of the City of London Corporation.

⁴⁸ 'International Book Fair of Radical Black and Third World Books', London Metropolitan Archives (LMA/4462/M/01/008: Third Fair: 'Sales of Books, records and tapes', 1984).

Chapter Five

STATE SUPPORT FOR BLACK BRITISH LITERATURE

The final chapter in this section explores the role played by state institutions such as the Greater London Council (GLC) and the Arts Council of Great Britain in providing financial backing and advocacy for black writing during the period from the 1970s to the turn of the century. This chapter draws extensively upon documentation about the Arts Council of Great Britain held at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, in order to reach an understanding as to how the Council reacted to wider socio-political developments and how this, in turn, affected its relationship with writers and publishers.

The GLC was the local government administrative body for Greater London from 1965 to 1986. In the five years prior to its abolition in 1986 the Council was led by Ken Livingstone (with the exception of 1984, when John Wilson was Leader). During this time, Livingstone introduced high-spend socialist policies, which put the GLC in direct conflict with the then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's Conservative central government, and actively favoured grants to promote the interests of minority groups. One such group was the Asian Women Writers' Collective (AWWC), which was founded in 1984.¹ A second example is Akira Press, a small independent publishing house set up in 1983 that specialised in West Indian poetry and books about black people in Britain.

The Council recognised, early on, the emergence of a vibrant black arts scene, and within this scene some promising black literature. On the basis of the contribution that this

¹ One of its founding members was the writer and activist, Ravinder Randhawa. Born in India in 1952 and moved to Britain in 1959, aged seven, she cannot in theory be labelled as 'black British'. She is, however, one of a number of writers singled out by Lyn Innes in *A History of Black and Asian Writing* (2002) who were either born in Britain or came to this country as young children and who wrote out of the experience of being located in Britain during the 1970s and 1980s. Like Buchi Emecheta, author of *In the Ditch* (1972), *Second-Class Citizen* (1974) and *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) and Abdulrazak Gurnah, author of *Memory of Departure* (1987), *Pilgrims Way* (1988) and *Dottie* (1990), and the black British writers David Simon (*Railton Blues*) and Norman Smith (*Bad Friday*), Randhawa drew upon the experiences and realities of life in Britain for black and Asian people as subject matter for her fiction.

might make to British culture, the Council took its support of this sector seriously, and made the funding of literature and its publication a high priority. The specific examples of the AWWC and Akira Press provide an indication of the enabling effect that the Council went on to have upon the publication of minority ethnic fiction.

The third issue of *Wasafiri* reveals three interesting points relating to the GLC's involvement in the publication of black British literature. Firstly, its editors acknowledged a debt of gratitude to the organisers of the GLC Literature Competition for the opportunity to publish a sample of the winning entries in that issue, and to feature some of the winners in 'Books Received'. The GLC Literature Competition had been established by the Race Equality Unit at the Council in 1985 with the aim of promoting black literature. It offered a total prize fund of £13,500 across various categories of writing, from major published works of fiction to previously unpublished poems and short stories, as well as plays and criticism. Interestingly, in 1985, the roll call of winners included soon-to-be well known writers, such as Caryl Phillips for his novel, *The Final Passage*,² David Dabydeen for his work of criticism, *Hogarth's Blacks*,³ poet Fred D'Aguiar for his collection, *Mama Dot*,⁴ and the novelists Rhona Martin (*Mango Walk*) and Richard Adams (*Maia*).⁵

Secondly, in the same editorial Prabhu Guptara provides an indication of the links forged between organisations like ATCAL and the Council. These, whilst coincidental at times, nevertheless built upon a shared desire to publicise and encourage black British writers and writing. Finally, it is worth commenting that Guptara also remarked that the words 'black British' were not actually used in nomenclature of the GLC's Literature Competition: 'it is noteworthy that people are happy to accept African, Asian and Caribbean literature' he wrote, 'but talk of "Black British" literature seems to be too close

² In *Wasafiri* No. 3 (1985) the winning entry of the Malcolm X Prize for major published work is named as Caryl Phillips, *The Last Passage*, fiction (Faber). Faber actually published Phillips's *The Final Passage*, presumably the same novel under a slightly revised title, in 1985.

³ David Dabydeen, *Hogarth's Blacks: Images of Blacks in 18th-Century English Art* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987).

⁴ Fred D'Aguiar, *Mama Dot* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1985).

⁵ Rhona Martin, *Mango Walk* (London: Bodley Head, 1981); Richard Adams, *Maia* (London: Viking Press, 1984).

to the bone for some people, even within ATCAL'.⁶ This is particularly interesting, since it explains why ATCAL's primary objectives stated a commitment to promoting the work of writers that expressed 'the experience of those of African and Caribbean descent in Britain'. The apparent resistance on the part of some members of ATCAL to talk about 'black British' literature in the mid-1980s highlights the fact that this label was not, in fact, in widespread use at the time, and that political tensions continued to bubble beneath the surface of culture and society. It also reinforces the problems associated, more generally, with the practice of labelling a group of writers. As the author of a bibliography of black British literature which was based largely on his own collection of black British literary material, Guptara was clearly an exponent of a specific black British identity. With what can be seen as remarkable foresight, however, he admits that, 'perhaps in another century we will even have repeated the integrationist miracle of the last century and specifically "Black British Literature" will have come and gone in the flux of history'.⁷

Guptara's comments draw attention to the fact that prior to the mid-1980s black British literature was yet to achieve widespread recognition. The Greater London Council has, in fact, with its sponsorship of Guptara's bibliography, been given the accolade of being one of the first to recognise black British literature.⁸ The GLC's championing of black writers and writing in Britain incorporated a variety of projects and publications that were aimed at providing a record of both the historical and contemporary contributions made by black artists to British society. The activities of the GLC were underpinned by the Council's Race Equality Unit, part of the main Arts and Recreation Department. This Unit provided financial support to enable specific projects and publications, like *Issue Three of Wasafiri* and Guptara's bibliography.

Between 1981 and 1986, the Race Equality Unit had developed three major components for a Black Arts policy. Self-credited as the first local authority in the country

⁶ Prabhu Guptara, 'Editorial: "Happening at all was a triumph" - the London Literature Competition', *Wasafiri*, 2, no. 3 (1985), pp. 3-4 (p. 4).

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ See Bruce King, *The Internationalization of English Literature*, The Oxford English Literary History, Volume 13: 1948-2000 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 133.

to develop such a policy and to respond to the needs and concerns of black artists by creating resources, the first element of this was a substantial increase in its grant aid programme over five years.⁹ In 1982/3 for example, the total amount of funding available to minority groups via the Ethnic Arts Sub-Committee was £400,000; this steadily rose by 1985/6 to £2,118,000 as demand increased. The second and third parts of the policy were intended to develop a race equality programme and other Black Arts initiatives. In addition to a quite substantial budget of its own, the Ethnic Arts Sub-Committee had seventeen Black Arts advisors.¹⁰ At this time, in the early 1980s, 'black' was still being used expediently as a term of identification among communities of people of African, Asian and Caribbean origin in Britain. Although the application of the term 'Black Art' to the work of black artists was later described as a 'misuse' by Rasheed Araeen in 1988, it was also acknowledged by Araeen to refer to 'a specific historical development within contemporary arts practices [that] emerged directly from the joint struggle of Asian, African and the Caribbean people against racism'.¹¹ As such, the Council's Black Arts policies, which incorporated a diversity of politically-allied minority groups, provide a timely example of some of the 'contemporary arts practices' that were developed in response to the political struggles of black people in Britain.

A further example of a GLC funding beneficiary is Bladestock Publications. This was a short-lived specialist Afro-Caribbean book distribution and wholesale company, established in 1985. It acted as the exclusive distributor for Akira Press, Black Star Press, ACER/Afro-Caribbean Resource Project, Karnak House and *Wasafiri*, and as the wholesaler of relevant titles from mainstream and educational publishers including Allison & Busby, Longman, Heinemann, OUP, Macmillan, Hamish Hamilton, and specialist

⁹ All of the information provided here about the GLC's Race Equality Unit and its grant aid programme has been taken from the Arts Council of Great Britain: records, 1928-1997, held at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

¹⁰ These facts and figures are taken from the GLC Black Arts Policy – 1981-86 documents, Arts Council of Great Britain: records 1928-1997 ACGB/59/242 (Box File), at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

¹¹ R. Araeen, *The Essential Black Art* (London: Kala Press, 1988) quoted by Leon Wainwright, 'Canon Questions: Art in "Black Britain"', in Gail Low and Marion Wynne-Davies, *A Black British Canon?* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 143-167 (p. 147).

publishers such as The Women's Press and Bogle L'Ouverture. Bladestock was the recipient of a one-off capital grant from the GLC and a start-up loan provided by the Greater London Enterprise Board. This financial support was provided in order that Bladestock might offer 'a new and important service to black publishing'.¹² Ken Worpole, founder of Bladestock, identified a gap in the market for a specialist distributor of Afro-Caribbean literature.¹³ Since the many small ethnic publishers which Bladestock hoped to work with were not widely known, nor had the promotion budgets to bring them to the attention of many booksellers, there was, he thought, an unmet need for his service.¹⁴ Worpole hoped to alleviate some of the difficulties of distribution faced by black writers and writing, problems that were expanded upon by Amon Saba Sakaana in 1988 in a letter to the *Washington Post*. In this letter, Sakaana listed the difficulties encountered by the black press in London, which included: financial constraints, an inability to gain media attention, and distribution difficulties.¹⁵ It is important to note that these problems were not necessarily unique to autonomous black publishing organisations. In the revised edition of *Publishing Now* (1996), Peter Owen identified economic recession, the impact of new media, library under-funding, reductions in print runs, massive returns of unsold books, the difficulty in obtaining an original fiction paperback review, and a reduction in overseas markets as some of the problems encountered by publishers of all sizes, but by small independents in particular.¹⁶

Nevertheless, the problems faced by black presses in particular were compounded by the short-lived nature of organisations such as Bladestock. After experiencing severe financial difficulties, which were worsened by an unsuccessful request for funding from

¹² Ken Worpole to Kate March at the Arts Council of Great Britain, unpublished letter dated 10 November, 1986. Arts Council of Great Britain records, 1928-1997- ACGB/59/242 (Box File), Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Amon Saba Saakana, 'Out of The Colonial Cocoon', *Washington Post*, 3 July 1988, Book World, p. X15.

¹⁶ Peter Owen, *Publishing Now* (London: Peter Owen, 1993; rev. edn., London: Peter Owen, 1996)

the Arts Council for non-commercial work, and with no provision of post-abolition funding from the GLC, Bladestock folded in 1987 – just two years after it was started.

The funding of ethnic minority projects by the GLC can be seen, therefore, to have had an influence on two levels. It provided an instant source of income which led to the creation of a number of worthwhile initiatives. However, for those small publishing houses, booksellers, and distributors like Bladestock, that relied heavily upon grant aid from local government sources, chances of survival when this financial assistance was removed were slim. As Sarah White noted in 2006, Reading Matters (a community bookshop in Wood Green, London) and the publisher Sabaar were both seemingly affected when their funding was removed in the 1980s.¹⁷ Bladestock Publications was another example of such a casualty. It was also a victim of bad timing, having been set up towards the end of the GLC's existence, it had no time in which to become established before its funding was removed and the GLC was abolished.

The GLC was at the vanguard of efforts to transform London into a truly multicultural city by favouring grants to promote the interests of diverse minority groups. Evidently, its abolition in 1986 had serious ramifications for several minority organisations. Yet, contemporary media coverage implied that the effect of the abolition of the GLC was less devastating than the examples above might suggest. According to some newspaper articles, the transition period after the GLC was abolished in 1986 was relatively smooth for all organisations, even the tiny ethnic and community arts groups in receipt of grant aid. A *Financial Times* article recorded optimistically that, 'in almost every case the subsidy they received from a metropolitan council has been made good by funds from the Arts Council, their local authority, or in London, the Richmond Scheme'.¹⁸ The Asian Women Writers Collective is an example of one publishing organisation that was initially funded by the GLC and that continued to receive funding at a later stage, through Greater London Arts Association and Lambeth Council. Akira Press appeared to suffer

¹⁷ Philippa Ireland, 'Conversation with Sarah White', recorded 10 August 2006. See Appendix 2, below, pp. 232-239.

¹⁸ Antony Thorncroft, 'Pips Squeak For Survival', *Financial Times*, 29 March 1986, p. XIII.

when the GLC was abolished: it is included in the list of exhibitors in the programme for the 1985 Book Fair, but in none of the later lists.¹⁹ It was, however, mentioned as being distributed by Central Books in subsequent programmes for the Fair, and continues to operate as a publisher of established young poets, playwrights and novelists in the UK, Caribbean, Europe, Africa and Asia.²⁰ In 1986, Akira Press Publications brought out the black British author, David Simon's, second novel, *Secrets of the Sapodilla*.²¹ There is some evidence to suggest, therefore, that not all of the GLC's clients were forced to close down after the Council was abolished.

When the GLC was abolished in 1986, grant aid provision of £25m was made available through other statutory bodies. These included other local authorities and the Arts Council (this provision was reduced to £21m the following year). It was at this point, it has been argued, that the Arts Council began to consciously direct funding towards minority culture.²² It was, undoubtedly, a defining moment in the history of the Arts Council's involvement with black and ethnic minority culture. However, there is also evidence to support the suggestion that the Council was made aware of the necessity to provide financial support to ethnic minority arts in Britain as early as 1976, when it sponsored research into a landmark report, *The Arts Britain Ignores: The Arts of Ethnic Minorities in Britain*.²³ This report revealed a wealth of cultural activity within ethnic minority communities which, for the most part, remained outside the general arts activity and formal funding patterns of local authorities and the Arts Council. The legacy of the report was both immediate and long-term. In addition to enabling the setting up of the Minorities' Arts Advisory Service (MAAS) in London, *The Arts Britain Ignores* ultimately became the reference point for all future research in this area.

¹⁹ Sarah White, Roxy Harris and Sharmilla Beezmohun, *A Meeting of the Continents: The International Book Fair of Radical and Third World Books - Revisited* (New Beacon Books, 2005), p. 200.

²⁰ White et al., *A Meeting of the Continents*, pp. 269, 307.

²¹ David Simon, *Secrets of the Sapodilla* (London: Akira Press, 1986).

²² King, *The Internationalization of English Literature*, p. 126.

²³ Naseem Khan, *The Arts Britain Ignores* (London, Community Relations Commission, 1976).

Significantly, the report exposed a gap within the publishing trade for books that fed 'enquiring young minds' and for children's books that featured black children.²⁴ Organisations like New Beacon Books and Bogle L'Ouverture were held up in the report as singular examples of publishing companies-cum-bookshops that had 'done sterling work in promoting the wider circulation of ideas' by stocking a wide range of literature and publishing their own material.²⁵ The report's author, Naseem Khan, called specifically for the allocation of resources to fund research and publication by firms in touch with the black community.²⁶ However, the Arts Council did not rise to this challenge.

The profile of minority ethnic arts was raised further, in 1982, in a press release that stated the Council's commitment to the encouragement of ethnic arts;²⁷ a move that was followed by the publication of *The Glory of the Garden* (1984).²⁸ This publication was a review of the council's existing operations and funding policies as well as a strategy document which set policy for the following five years. It highlighted changes taking place in British society at the time that had a significant effect upon the Council's funding of the arts. Crucially, yet perhaps slightly belatedly, in the light of Khan's pioneering research six years earlier, which had challenged local authorities, arts organisations and statutory bodies to recognise, encourage and promote the art of ethnic minorities in order that Britain might justifiably call itself a multicultural society, the report stressed the 'changing perceptions of the requirements of a multicultural society'.²⁹

These developments indicate that by the mid-1980s the Arts Council had begun to engage with, and to adapt to, changes in British society. In fact, in order to effect the necessary alterations and ultimately move towards promoting cultural diversity within the arts, the Council established an Ethnic Arts Working Group in 1982 to monitor the success

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ This press release from February 1982 is currently held in the Arts Council of Great Britain: records, 1928-1997 - ACGB/59/242, Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

²⁸ Arts Council of Great Britain, *The Glory of the Garden: the development of the arts in England* (London, The Arts Council of Great Britain, 1984).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

of applications to the Arts Council and to seek ways of generating activity in this area. Following the publication of *The Glory of the Garden*, in 1986, the Council developed an Ethnic Minority Arts Action Plan on the basis that 'there are many fine Afro-Caribbean and Asian artists working in this country and [that] their valuable contribution to the creativity and vitality of the nation's cultural life is neither fully appreciated nor exploited'.³⁰ However, neither the publication of *The Glory of the Garden* nor these concomitant changes in policy and practice had an immediate effect upon the funding of multicultural literature.

Sadly, whilst these developments in policy were taking place, the Council's Literature department experienced a major reduction in its budget allocation for 1985/6. This left the department unable to effectively implement any significant changes to its existing funding strategy in order to promote ethnic minority writers and writing. Justification was provided thus: 'English literature [...] is sustained by a large and profitable commercial publishing industry. It is a basic ingredient in the school curriculum. It is available to the public through the public library system. In these circumstances, the impact of the Arts Council's subsidy for literature other than poetry is highly marginal'.³¹ However, as Khan's research had revealed eight years previously, there was a large gap in provision from this 'large and profitable commercial publishing industry' which could not be met entirely by the small number of independent publishers-cum-bookshops currently in existence. As John La Rose, founder of New Beacon Books, recognised, there was a mass of material worth publishing and one publisher couldn't do it all.³² Even the additional efforts of those educational publishers mentioned in previous chapters – Heinemann, Longman and others – could not fill the space available for the publication of a variety of material by, for, and about black people in Britain. As previous chapters have argued, schools and libraries were major markets for specialist booksellers and publishers like New

³⁰ Sir William Rees-Mogg, Chair of the Arts Council of Great Britain (1982–1989) in *The Arts and Ethnic Minorities Action Plan*, February 1986. Arts Council of Great Britain records, 1928-1997 - ACGB/59/242, Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

³¹ *The Glory of the Garden*, p. 29.

³² Philippa Ireland, 'Conversation with Sarah White', recorded 10 August 2006. See Appendix 2, below, pp. 232-239.

Beacon Books and Bogle L'Ouverture. However they were not the only markets, nor were they always reliable. Maintaining the interest of the library service and educationalists in minority ethnic literature was a constant struggle, one which would surely have benefited from the additional support of the Arts Council.

It is within this context that, in 1988, the Arts Council's Literature department, under the directorship of Alastair Niven, commissioned a report on Black Literary Publishing in Britain. The time scale for this project was short, the research being carried out over a six month period with a view to the final report being published in 1989. Despite specific resource allocation being made available to this project, including a budget of £2,000 for a research worker and £24,000 put aside for its immediate implementation, there is no evidence to suggest that final publication and widespread circulation of the findings were ever achieved.

The aim of this report on black literary publishing was to document the findings of an investigation into Britain's black and multicultural literary publishers with a view to making recommendations for improving literary publishing in this field. The findings of the report substantiate the concerns raised by others, like Ken Worpole and Amon Saba Sakaana, about the specific problems facing black publishers at the time. The report specifically highlighted some of the problems faced by black publishers in accessing and raising finance and developing suitable networks of contacts, as well as the minimal amount of mainstream publication of black literature. Due credit was given to the small number of well-known names of the previous three decades that had, on occasion, been published by small black or multicultural presses. Wilson Harris, Edward Kamau Brathwaite, David Dabydeen, James Berry, Mervyn Morris, CLR James, Andrew Salkey, Grace Nichols, Valerie Bloom, Faustin Charles and Linton Kwesi Johnson were all mentioned in this vein. By way of contrast, the limited attention given by major publishers to emerging and talented black British writers was lamented. Black and multicultural presses, the report suggested, believed that they might fill a gap in the market for books by, for, and about black people in Britain, but were hampered by lack of funding. The fact that a number of small, independent presses often found themselves in a financially unstable

position was confirmed by this research. The report observed that whilst small independent presses at the time were financed totally, or in part, by personal borrowing or short-term grant aid, over half operated at a loss. In response to this, the primary recommendation was for secure supplementary funding that would enable black and multicultural presses to establish commercially viable operations. This was followed by the suggestion that any funding should be linked to a strategy for developing marketing, distribution and expertise in order to improve the appearance of books, and that wages might be paid to editorial staff.

In point of fact, some staff at New Beacon Books did forgo a regular income in order that it might continue its publishing and bookselling operations. Sarah White has recalled how John La Rose took only a small salary during the early years of New Beacon's existence, whilst she met their regular financial commitments with her salary from full-time work at *New Scientist*.³³ Both Sarah White and Jessica Huntley have recounted how the flexibility and goodwill of their suppliers was crucial to the survival of their publishing and bookselling operations. The debt that they both owed to their mutual printer, John Sankey of Villiers Publications Ltd, has frequently been acknowledged.³⁴ Both New Beacon Books and Bogle L'Ouverture stand out as examples of minority publishers that steadfastly refused to solicit funding from statutory sources. In recent interviews, Sarah White emphasised how, at New Beacon Books 'the whole concept of the publishing and the bookselling was that it should be independent' and Eric Huntley stressed that the origins of Bogle L'Ouverture were 'self-independent not relying on white people to fund the company'.³⁵

The self-sufficient approach of New Beacon and Bogle L'Ouverture to their publishing and bookselling activities will be looked at in detail in the following chapter. Examples of organisations that *were* in receipt of funding from the GLC have previously

³³ Philippa Ireland, 'Conversation with Sarah White', recorded 10 August 2006. See Appendix 2, below, pp. 232-239.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, Philippa Ireland, 'Conversation with Eric and Jessica Huntley', recorded 9 January 2007. See Appendix 3, below, pp. 240-246.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

been provided, and the damaging effect upon these organisations when this funding was removed has been highlighted. Additional archival evidence of funding for specific publishers of black interest books by the Literature department at the Arts Council is limited to two instances: Mantra Publications and Peepal Tree Press.

Established in 1984, Mantra Publishing in London produces 'multicultural and dual language books, cassettes and teacher's resources for children, teenagers and adults'.³⁶ It specialises in Asian books by Asian writers, and its fiction and non-fiction youth titles reflect the life of young Asians in Britain and issues that affect them.³⁷ Peepal Tree Press was established in Leeds in 1985 by Jeremy Poynting, a regular contributor to *Wasafiri* and to debates about the role of literary books and publishers in modern African and Caribbean literature. Peepal Tree Press set out to, and continues to, specialise in books by Caribbean, African, South Asian and black British writers. Poynting has a long association with black interest books, having been first a visitor to the International Books Fairs and then a regular exhibitor from 1986 onwards.³⁸ In 1991/2 the Arts Council's Literature department allocated each publishing house £18,000, and £18,000 and £14,000 respectively in 1992/3.³⁹

Bruce King's argument that the Arts Council began to consciously direct resources towards the funding of minority culture in 1986 is based on the appointment in that year to its Literature Advisory Panel of David Dabydeen and Alastair Niven.⁴⁰ Niven also became a member of the Arts Council's Ethnic Minorities Committee in the same year. King has taken these appointments to be an indication of the department's move towards increased support for multicultural literature, its publication and promotion. In May 1986, the Council's draft 'Ethnic Minority Arts: Literature Department Action Plan' stated that the

³⁶ This description of Mantra's publishing activities is taken from the programme for the Eleventh International Book Fair of Radical and Third World Books, in Sarah White et al., *A Meeting of the Continents*, p. 471.

³⁷ A further description of Mantra's activities is included in Alison Donnell, *Companion to Contemporary Black British Culture* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 192.

³⁸ White et al., *A Meeting of the Continents*, p. 25.

³⁹ Arts Council of Great Britain: records, 1928-1997 - ACGB/59/242 (Box File), Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

⁴⁰ King, *The Internationalization of English Literature*, p. 126.

panel membership comprised ‘two members appointed *who have specialist knowledge of the literature of ethnic minority communities in Great Britain* – Alastair Niven (academic) and David Dabydeen’ (my emphasis).⁴¹ Evidently, the Literature Department was, from this point in time, intending to broaden the scope of its work to include black writing. Indeed, the creation of this particular committee signifies the Arts Council’s response to the changing nature of British culture and society. As such it must be viewed alongside similar initiatives being put in place, at the GLC and other cultural bodies.

After being appointed as director of literature for the Council in 1987, Alastair Niven spearheaded a fight against suggestions that the Council should cut its support for literature. His efforts in this area are confirmed in contemporary newspaper coverage of events taking place within the Council which stated that ‘the council [...] disowned its 1984 policy statement which said that “the impact of the Arts Council’s subsidy of literature other than poetry is highly marginal”’,⁴² and ‘the Arts Council yesterday reversed a four-year decline in its financial support for literature and writers [...] there is to be a report on black and multicultural presses. More money is provided for writers bursaries’.⁴³

The Council had a long history of providing bursaries and grants to enable individual black writers in Britain to write and to be published – successful past recipients of Arts Council bursaries included V.S. Naipaul, Shiva Naipaul, James Berry, Salman Rushdie, Wilson Harris, and Dambudzo Marachera. Publishing grants (which were awarded as a guarantee against potential losses) had also been given for the work of V.S. Naipaul, Roy Heath, and Edgar White. Niven, however, now prioritised the support of culturally diverse literatures as an integral part of the department’s sponsorship of mainstream British literature:

In 1991/92, the specific allocation for Literature Department cultural diversity projects was £56,118 (approximately 5%). In addition, a proportion of

⁴¹ Arts Council of Great Britain: records, 1928-1997 - ACGB/59/242 (Box File), Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

⁴² Andrew Billen, ‘Money for writers’, *The Times*, 14 April 1988.

⁴³ Nicholas de Jongh, ‘Arts Council puts £630,000 into support for literature’, *The Guardian*, 14 April 1988, p. 20.

spending through our other budget heading was used for cultural diversity projects [...] £103,632 (approximately 20%). We also expect all our annual and revenue clients to direct significant effort in the area of cultural diversity, and this objective is an important part of our appraisal and monitoring process. Cultural diversity is reflected in other directly funded activities [...] a recent Libraries conference highlighted black writers and assistance with the Society of Authors bursary scheme is on condition that they advertised in the black press.⁴⁴

The years immediately following Niven's appointment were not without controversy in respect of the funding of black writers. In 1988 the writer Fiona Pitt-Kethley took legal action against the Arts Council on the grounds that it discriminated against her in refusing to consider her as an applicant for a literature bursary in 1986/87 since, on this occasion, these were specifically limited to writers of Afro-Caribbean or Asian origin. Documents relating to the 'Ethnic Minority Arts – Literature Department Action Plan' confirm that in 1986 it was suggested and subsequently agreed by members of the Literature Advisory Panel (although with some reservations) that three writers' bursaries of £5,000 might be devoted to black writers as a demonstration of the Council's ethnic minority policy.⁴⁵ At the time this was deemed to be the only feasible way in which the department could deliver the required funding shift towards the support of ethnic minority arts that it was committed to as a result of the publication of the Council's Ethnic Minority Arts Action Plan earlier in the year (the remainder of its budget had already been allocated to existing Arts Council clients). Despite precedents being set for the funding of black writers in Britain by the Arts Council (many of whom went on to be critically acclaimed authors), there were some genuine concerns that three writers of sufficient quality would be found and that, rather than being a positive move, it might appear patronising and unfair.

⁴⁴ Cultural Diversity Pro Forma: Literature Department, September 1992. Arts Council of Great Britain records, 1928-1997 - ACGB/59/242, Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

⁴⁵ Arts Council of Great Britain: records, 1928-1997 - ACGB/59/242 (Box File), Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

It transpires that these concerns were not unfounded. In hindsight, what was considered to be a logical and well-intentioned means of raising the profile of black writers in Britain – a move that was praised by Fred D’Aguiar, who argued in a letter to *The Independent* in October 1989 that ‘the rarity of such successes (disproportionately few in relation to the number of writers and artists) testifies to the crucial place of the Arts Council grants for minorities in British society’⁴⁶ – had the counter-effect of portraying the Council as overly liberal and was received with hostility in some quarters. Opposition to the manner in which the literature department proposed to provide support to the Ethnic Minority Arts Action Plan has been found in correspondence to Hugh Ritter, Secretary-General of the Arts Council, in response to his letter of 1986 requesting that publishing houses in receipt of revenue from the department co-operate with the Plan by broadening and encouraging ethnic participation within their organisations. On the whole, the department considered the responses received to be favourable, although it was noted that ‘some are wary of the Council’s interventionist approach and seek to defend their editorial independence’.⁴⁷

Later on, and for the first time, the Arts Council found itself pitted head-to-head with the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE). The CRE took up the Pitt-Kethley case on the basis that the Council had discriminated against white writers. As Alastair Niven recalled during an interview in 2007, the judges ultimately ruled in favour of the latter, a decision which, in his opinion, provided the Literature department with encouragement and, more importantly, with the opportunity to positively discriminate in favour of minority groups without the risk of being accused of inverted racism in the future.⁴⁸ Nor did this case deter black writers from applying for funding and ultimately it did little to damage the endeavours of the Arts Council’s Literature department in this area. On the contrary, by

⁴⁶ Fred D’Aguiar, ‘Letter: Arts grants for ethnic minorities’, *The Independent*, 12 October 1989, p. 28.

⁴⁷ Literature Department Action Plan, 1986. Arts Council of Great Britain records, 1928-1997 - ACGB/59/242, Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

⁴⁸ Dr Alastair Niven in conversation with Philippa Ireland, 1 November 2007.

1990 Alastair Niven was able to write of the encouraging signs of national recognition for black British literature:

close on 40% of applications for literature funding at the Arts Council of Great Britain now comes from non-white sources. At one time the lack of trust in an organisation which was perceived as being part of the white establishment meant that there were hardly any such applications. It is at last being understood in Britain that the case for recognition of black writing lies as much in explaining it to others as proclaiming it in within the black community itself.⁴⁹

Niven also wrote personally to John La Rose along the same lines, stating that, in 1989, 35% of unsolicited applications were from black sources, that perceptions of the Arts Council were changing, and that for the past three years six out of ten writers' bursaries were awarded to black writers in competition with white writers.⁵⁰ His comments lay bare the significant amount of distrust and antagonism that had previously been directed towards the Arts Council, specifically from the black community prior to the early 1990s. There is further evidence of this scepticism within archival documents relating to the Council's research into black and multicultural publishing in Britain. Several prominent members of the black publishing community declined to take part in this research. New Beacon Books, Bogle L'Ouverture, Karia Press and Karnak House all chose not to be involved for a variety of reasons, with two stating that it was because the research was being carried out for the Arts Council. To quote: 'The Arts Council has never done anything for black people in the past, so why should we expect it to change now?'⁵¹ It was therefore a sign of significant progress that in 1990 Niven was able to attest to a flourishing relationship between the black community and the Arts Council.

⁴⁹ Alastair Niven, 'Black British Writing: The Struggle for Recognition', in *Crisis and Creativity in the New Literatures in English*, ed. by Geoffrey Davis and Hena Maes-Jelinek (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1990), pp. 325-332 (p. 331).

⁵⁰ Alastair Niven to John La Rose, (date unknown). Arts Council of Great Britain records, 1928-1997 - ACGB/59/242, Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

⁵¹ Arts Council of Great Britain records, 1928-1997 - ACGB//132 (Black Literary Publishing report (1 file)), Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

This particular relationship was never an easy one. Links between the black community and the Arts Establishment were, at best, strained and more often non-existent. Niven's personal acquaintance with John La Rose and his credibility within the black British intellectual community helped to improve the situation. Niven has described La Rose as one of the 'most charming and courteous of men' and 'very highly principled'.⁵² However his principles might be seen as intransigence, and were at times a stumbling block in building strong relations between black publishers and the mainstream book industry, as the earlier example of Layton's research demonstrated.

Since the 1990s, the Arts Council has continued to evolve and reflect the changes taking place within British society. As Britain has become more culturally diverse, its major arts funding body has also changed – becoming an ambassador for diversity at the end of the period. In 2003, cultural diversity was clearly considered to be central to all of the Arts Council England's programmes and its relationships. The Council's definition of diversity was as far-reaching in scope as its ambitions. It took 'a broad and inclusive interpretation, as meaning the full range of diversity of the culture of this country', i.e. race and ethnicity, and disability as well as (the unstated aspects) regional differences and sexual orientation.⁵³ More significantly from the point of view of this thesis, at the same time and whilst emphasising the transformative nature of the Arts, the Council also declared that it would create more opportunities for people to experience and take part in life-changing artistic experiences, through amongst other things, 'performing, playing and *publishing*' (my emphasis).⁵⁴

The relationship between black British writers, publishers and the Arts Council continuously adjusted to reflect the changes taking place within British society throughout the 1970s, 1980s and into the 1990s. More recently, the Council's championing of cultural diversity has been reflected in its 2003/2004 *decibel* project, a strategic initiative to promote artists of African, Asian and Caribbean descent in England. *In Full Colour*:

⁵² Interview with Dr Alastair Niven', 1 November 2007.

⁵³ *Ambitions for the Arts 2003-2006* (London: Arts Council England, 2003), p 6.

⁵⁴ *Ambitions for the Arts 2003-2006*, p 3.

Cultural Diversity in Publishing Today (2004) is the final report of a *Bookseller* and *decibel* survey into ethnicity and publishing in Britain. This report highlighted the fact that the modern publishing industry workforce did not reflect Britain's diverse population. This was not news to many working within the industry, or to the Arts Council. In 1995, a *Sunday Times* article highlighted the lack of black representation in Britain's publishing houses, singling out Patsy Antoine, then Fiction Editor at Harper Collins, as 'the lone black face in mainstream British publishing' and emphasising the dearth of black agents at any of the established literary agencies.⁵⁵ The 'unfriendly white face' of British publishing,⁵⁶ and a shortage of black representation within the trade was considered one of the key reasons why there were few successful black writers in Britain at the time. Also in 1995, the Arts Council had set up a trainee scheme to encourage would-be publishers from black and Asian backgrounds into publishing. The impetus for this scheme was the successful outcome of the Pitt-Kethley case. It was intended that each trainee would be funded by the Arts Council and be attached to one or two publishing houses, ideally a mainstream publisher and a minority or small publisher, like New Beacon, with which they might end up working. It was anticipated that they would spend their time being moved around different departments, seeing the whole publishing process, from manuscript to rights, to the bookshops and promotion.⁵⁷ Its first recipient was Nana Yaa Mensah (now a journalist for the *New Statesman* and a contributing editor to *Wasafiri*). Nearly ten years later, the 'Diversity in Publishing Network' (DIPNET) was set up in 2004 by Alison Morrison and Elise Dillsworth (with the financial support of Arts Council England). This network aimed to promote the status and contribution of social groups traditionally underrepresented within all areas of publishing and offered support to those seeking to enter the industry. The need for an industry that is representative of modern British society was summed up by Margaret Busby when she said, 'I have seen a few but not enough changes within the

⁵⁵ Lesley Thomas, 'Brothers breaking on to the bookshelves - Adebayo brothers', *Sunday Times*, 13 August 1995, p.10/14.

⁵⁶ Natasha Walter, 'The Trouble with Publishing: in Black and White', *The Guardian*, 3 August 1995, p. 13.

⁵⁷ Interview with Dr Alastair Niven, 1 November 2007.

predominantly white publishing industry. How much richer and more exciting the nation's literary output could [be] coming out of a more varied, imaginative and committed publishing industry'.⁵⁸

It is therefore striking that a summary of the research findings of the *Bookseller/decibel* survey reveals that only 10 per cent of the 523 employees surveyed were from minority ethnic groups, that publishing management was almost exclusively white and there was a distinct lack of minority ethnic role models in senior management positions, and that there were no minority ethnic authors in the top 100 books of the previous year, 2003. *In Full Colour* was the stimulus for a three-year Diversity in Publishing programme which was launched in December 2004 by the Arts Council England in collaboration with a number of publishing houses and *decibel*. At Penguin and its parent company, Pearson, for example, schemes were set in motion to give talented black and Asian writers, proof-readers, and editors a chance in publishing. *Publishing News* quoted Pearson's Diversity Project Manager, Raphael Mokades, as saying 'our whole approach is to look at the population and to look at our workforce and see if they match, and unfortunately they don't'.⁵⁹ This discrepancy was put down to the fact that applications for jobs are predominantly made by white candidates. In response, Pearson and other publishers like Random House and HarperCollins increased their efforts, promoting publishing as a viable career option for students from all ethnic backgrounds through student societies, at universities, at career service centres and via recruitment agencies. Paid work experience programmes are now considered to play an important part in encouraging applicants for publishing work experience from culturally diverse backgrounds. In 2005, *The Bookseller* reported that both Random House and Faber were set to take on two trainees as part of an Arts Council-funded scheme to encourage ethnic diversity in publishing.⁶⁰ These 'Positive Action Traineeships' were also set up as a direct response to the publication of *In Full Colour*. Each bursary, advertised in the national

⁵⁸ Margaret Busby's comments can be found at DIPNET. Available: <http://www.dipnet.org.uk/about/support/> [30 August 2009].

⁵⁹ Claire Bott, 'A Black and White Issue', *Publishing News*, 29 October 2004.

⁶⁰ Katherine Rushton, 'Random and Faber trial trainees', *The Bookseller*, 27 April 2005.

press and worth £12,000, was attached to a year-long publishing apprenticeship at either Random House or Faber, although neither guaranteed automatic employment at the end of the programme. In the same year, Penguin launched a 'school' for sixth formers in a bid to encourage more ethnic minorities to consider publishing as a career.⁶¹

In addition, prizes like the *decibel* Penguin Prize were created to promote culturally diverse literatures. The prize was intended to fulfil two specific functions. First, it was meant as an opportunity for talented writers from culturally diverse backgrounds to showcase their work, secondly it enabled Penguin to discover promising new writers. The reward for winning was publication in a new Penguin anthology of culturally diverse writing.⁶² Reaction to the creation of this prize was mixed. Some were welcoming of this and other Arts Council-sponsored events that promoted cultural diversity in the arts. Poet Benjamin Zephaniah, who has earned for himself a reputation for scorning awards offered by the Establishment (he turned down an OBE from the Queen in 2003) declared that 'any award that raises the profile of a struggling minority community is a good thing'.⁶³ In contrast, it was considered to be a patronising form of positive discrimination, condescending, and a display of outright racial segregation on the part of the book industry and liberal middle classes by the author Nirpal Singh Dhaliwal, writing for *The Times*.⁶⁴ It was vilified by Dhaliwal for the danger it posed 'truly talented members of Britain's ethnic minorities' whose talent, he was concerned, would be marginalised over rewards for mediocrity. Comments such as 'patronising and bigoted' and 'explicitly discriminatory' featured in mainstream newspaper coverage of the prize.⁶⁵ Elsewhere, in a repeat of its earlier involvement with the Pitt-Kethley case, in 2007 the Commission for Racial

⁶¹ Alison Bone, 'Summer school at Penguin', *The Bookseller*, 5 May 2005.

⁶² Sylvia Jean Dickinson and others, *The decibel Penguin Prize Anthology Volume 1: New Voices from a Diverse Culture* (London: Penguin, 2006).

⁶³ Sarah Shannon, 'Making a Noise in the Bookcase', *The Independent*, 13 April 2005, Features, pp. 56-57 (p. 56).

⁶⁴ Nirpal Singh Dhaliwal, 'Gosh, brown and talented? Super', *The Times*, 16 April 2005, Features, p. 25.

⁶⁵ Anna Van Praagh, 'Ex-public schoolboy wins "patronising and bigoted" Arts Council book prize', *Mail on Sunday*, 24 April 2005, p. 40; Leo McKinsty, 'Whites need not apply', *The Spectator*, 24 September 2005, pp. 19-20.

Equality deemed the *decibel* Penguin Prize unlawful because by banning white authors from entering the competition it breached the Race Relations Act 1976.⁶⁶ This led to a revision of the entrance criteria for the prize, making it an award for the best submission based on the theme of personal stories of immigration to the UK.⁶⁷ Despite facing criticism, initiatives like these demonstrate how the Arts Council has moved on from its method of providing active, if slightly heavy-handed and sometimes patronising, encouragement for minority ethnic literatures in the 1980s and 1990s, into its current position as an advocate for the creation of a book industry that reflects the culturally diverse nature of British society in the twenty-first century.

At no time was the Arts Council or the GLC alone in opening up opportunities for black writing in Britain. Neither did they work in isolation as advocates of black British fiction and its publication. Other institutions, like the British Council, worked in tandem with these organisations, providing travel expenses for individual black British writers to tour abroad and supported the publication of journals and anthologies of black British literature.⁶⁸ In addition, major conferences were staged on the multicultural history of Britain and panel discussions convened in the wake of the British Council's 'Reinventing Britain' project. This project comprised a series of meetings on rethinking British national and cultural identity.⁶⁹ Examples such as these, and those discussed elsewhere, reveal how British culture and society changed over the course of the latter part of the twentieth century. What is most significant is how individuals and institutions reacted to these changes and the effect this reaction had upon the subsequent development of black British fiction and its publication.

⁶⁶ See Rob Singh, 'Ethnic story contest "is illegal"', *The Evening Standard*, 9 January 2007, LL 04, p. 9.

⁶⁷ See Celia Walden, 'The race is on', *The Daily Telegraph*, 11 January 2007, Features; Comment, p. 27 and Dalya Alberge, 'Race watchdog forces ethnic prize to admit white writers', *The Times*, 15 January 2007, p. 11 for example.

⁶⁸ Further examples of British Council sponsored events can be found in R. Victoria Arana and Lauri Ramey, 'Sea Change: Black British Writing', *BMA: The Sonia Sanchez Review*, 6, no. 2 (Spring 2001), pp. 30-1.

⁶⁹ See *Wasafiri*, 29 (Spring 1999), pp. 37-44 for a discussion of the impact of the opening conference in this series.

Part Two – Publishers and Publishing

Chapter Six

LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS

New Beacon Books, Bogle L'Ouverture Press and the Politics of black British Publishing

This chapter compares the work of two pioneering black publishers in Britain in the latter half of the twentieth century: New Beacon Books and Bogle L'Ouverture.¹ It positions the activities of each within the framework of shifting cultural and political agendas, and explores their motivation for publishing specific texts. It sets the scene for the publication of black British fiction by subsequent generations of book publishers.

New Beacon was founded in 1966 by John La Rose and Sarah White. It was followed two years later by Bogle L'Ouverture, set up by Eric and Jessica Huntley. Both were family concerns, and both had a history of co-operation. Despite being established within a short space of time of each other and against a backdrop of black political struggle, their origins were slightly different, as John La Rose has described:

In the first instance we, New Beacon Books, were established in 1966. We preceded the formation of the Caribbean Artists Movement (CAM) by a number of months. Then there came the action in 1968 on the part of the then government of Jamaica to refuse Walter Rodney the right of re-entry into Jamaica on his way back from a Black Writers Congress held in Canada in 1968 and we participated in struggle around that issue. Out of that struggle Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications was born.²

¹ Throughout this thesis 'Bogle L'Ouverture' will refer to both Bogle L'Ouverture Publications (the name of this radical black publishing house before it went into voluntary liquidation in 1989) and Bogle L'Ouverture Press (as this enterprise re-emerged with the help of Friends of Bogle in 1990). These are one and the same organisation.

² Sarah White, Roxy Harris, and Sharmilla Beezmohun, *A Meeting of the Continents: The International Book Fair of Radical and Third World Books – Revisited* (London: New Beacon Books, 2005), p. 3.

Before returning to their shared history, it is important to first consider each organisation separately in order to establish the rationale of their respective founders, and to examine the manner in which both carried out its own publishing activities.

The creation of New Beacon Books was part of John La Rose's life-long ambition to achieve long-term change for Caribbean people in Britain. His interest in publishing was driven by a powerful intellectual desire to confront, what he perceived as, the withholding of information from Caribbean people by colonial policy makers and to bring about lasting social, political and cultural change. After moving to England in 1961, he set up the specialist Caribbean publishing venture, New Beacon Books, in 1966. Its activities were intended as a vehicle by which to 'give an independent validation of one's own culture, history and politics – a sense of self – a break with discontinuity' through the publishing of and reprinting of affordable texts for black people, in Britain and across the globe.³ To this end, he began by publishing books about Caribbean history, politics and literature. The first book to be published by New Beacon was a personal one, being La Rose's own collection of poems, *Foundations*.⁴ This was the first of many books of poetry to be published by poets from the Caribbean and Africa, as well as by black British poets. The next book was a short biographical history of Marcus Garvey, based on a talk given by Adolph Edwards. As Sarah White recalled recently,

in those days, very little was known about Marcus Garvey. There was about one book available. So John thought it would be worthwhile to republish [a talk by Adolph Edwards] in a small booklet to introduce people to the ideas of Marcus Garvey. So we did that and it sold very well.⁵

In New Beacon's 2007 Publishing Catalogue, La Rose's son, Michael La Rose, explained the importance of this early publication:

³ John La Rose, 'About New Beacon Books' *New Beacon Books Publishing Catalogue 1991: 25th Anniversary 1966-1991* (London: New Beacon Books, 1991).

⁴ John La Rose, *Foundations* (London: New Beacon Books, 1966).

⁵ Philippa Ireland, 'Conversation with Sarah White', recorded 10 August 2006. See Appendix 2, below, pp. 232-239.

The emerging Rastafarian movement, along with black youths influenced by reggae music, used this book extensively for factual information about the life and achievements of Garvey. New Beacon was assisting the black consciousness movement as well as providing continuity of important ideas to a new generation.⁶

For John La Rose it was imperative that the books he published were placed in their appropriate historical, cultural and political contexts. He published two books of literary criticism: Wilson Harris's *Tradition, the Writer and Society* (1967) and *Caribbean Writers: Critical Essays* by Ivan Van Sertima (1968).⁷ Both were part of La Rose's vision to publish critical material on Caribbean literature that had been written by Caribbean people. New Beacon then began the important process of reprinting books. Examples include two books by John Jacob Thomas which were reprints from the nineteenth century. One was his grammar of the Creole language in Trinidad, *The Theory and Practice of Creole Grammar* (1969), which was perhaps the first recognition of origins of the Creole language; the other was *Froudacity: West Indian Fables Explained* (1969).⁸ Practically, for a small publisher like New Beacon reprinting texts was a way of getting information out quickly and relatively cheaply, rather than waiting for an author to write something original and creating a new publication from scratch. However, New Beacon was different to other contemporary publishers involved in reprinting Caribbean publications – like Frank Cass, for example, who produced hardback copies of texts which had been previously printed by colonialists living in or visiting the Caribbean in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Each New Beacon reprint was placed in its historical context with an up-to-date Introduction which formed an important part of contextualising the publication.⁹

⁶ Michael La Rose, *New Beacon Books Publishing Catalogue* (London: New Beacon Books, 2007), p. 4.

⁷ Wilson Harris, *Tradition, the Writer and Society* (London: New Beacon Books, 1967); Ivan Van Sertima, *Caribbean Writers: Critical Essays* (London: New Beacon Books, 1968).

⁸ John Jacob Thomas, *The Theory and Practice of Creole Grammar* (London: New Beacon Books, 1969; originally published Port of Spain: Chronical Publishing Office, 1869) and *Froudacity: West Indian Fables Explained* (London: New Beacon Books, 1969; originally published in 1889).

⁹ Philippa Ireland, 'Conversation with Sarah White', recorded 10 August 2006. See Appendix 2, below, pp. 232-239.

La Rose's varied interests drove other parts of his publishing agenda. He was very engaged with the history of 'The Beacon Period' which took place around *The Beacon* magazine in 1930s Trinidad, and from which New Beacon derived its name. Consequently, three novels from this era were reprinted by New Beacon: *Minty Alley* by C.L.R. James (1971) and two others by Alfred Mendes, *Pitch Lake* (1980) and *Black Fauns* (1984).¹⁰ Another aspect of New Beacon's reprinting programme was *Labour in the West Indies: the birth of a workers movement* by Arthur Lewis (1977).¹¹ This was considered to be a key political pamphlet in the history of the trade union movement in the Caribbean. Its publication reflected La Rose's personal interest in this specific aspect of Caribbean politics, one which was built upon his own experience of active trade unionism in his native Trinidad.

Michael La Rose has commented on the context and background to his father's publishing activities, and the extent to which these continued to be motivated by a cultural and political agenda. The publication of texts such as *Kaiso Calypso Music* (1990), *Trinidad Carnival: mandate for a national theatre* (1972) and *Mas in Notting Hill: documents in the struggle for a representative and democratic carnival 1989/1990* (1990) attest to this agenda.¹² The struggles of Caribbean people in Britain were another focus of La Rose's publishing. The publication of *How the West Indian Child is Made Educationally Subnormal in the British School System* (1971) was referred to previously, in Chapter Three. Roxy Harris's *Being Black: Selections from "Soledad Brother" by George Jackson and "Soul on Ice" by Eldridge Cleaver: with Questions and Notes* (1981) was based on Harris's own experience in schools and sought to expose young black people to contemporary debates around identity.¹³ This publication featured a question, answer and discussion format purposely designed for use in schools, and it was one of a small

¹⁰ C.L.R. James, *Minty Alley* (London: New Beacon Books, 1971); Alfred Mendes, *Pitch Lake* (London: New Beacon Books, 1980) and *Black Fauns* (London: New Beacon Books, 1984).

¹¹ Arthur Lewis, *Labour in the West Indies: the birth of a workers movement* (London: New Beacon Books, 1977).

¹² Michael La Rose, *New Beacon Books Publishing Catalogue 2007*, p. 5.

¹³ Roxy Harris, *Being Black: Selections for "Soledad Brother" by George Jackson and "Soul on Ice" by Eldridge Cleaver: with Questions and Notes* (London: New Beacon Books, 1981).

number of New Beacon publications that were aimed specifically at the educational market.

New Beacon also began to publish novels by emerging black writers in Britain. These included second generation black Briton Norman Smith, author of one of the first novelistic representations of the black British experience, *Bad Friday* (1985), and Ruel White, whose novel *Heroes Through The Day* was published by New Beacon in 1990.¹⁴ Written by a young black author who was born and grew up in Birmingham, *Bad Friday* depicted the dreams and dilemmas of five black teenagers in 1980s Britain. Originally published in 1982 by Trinity Arts, a community publisher based in Birmingham, it was short listed for the Young Observer Fiction Prize in that year. It was revised and republished by New Beacon Books in 1985. The novel went on to be adapted into a play and remains in print.

John La Rose's vision for his publishing activities was shared by others. In particular, by members of the Caribbean Artists Movement (CAM), which he co-founded with Andrew Salkey and Edward Brathwaite in 1962. From the beginning, CAM and New Beacon were inextricably linked. Not only was John La Rose central to both organisations, but some of New Beacon's very early publications were part of the joint vision which La Rose and other CAM members shared in making it possible for Caribbean people to criticise their own literature, history and politics. The Movement also became a catalyst for the bookselling activities of New Beacon Books. The current New Beacon bookshop was established in Stroud Green Road, London in 1973. Prior to this however, John La Rose and Sarah White sold their books on a much less formal basis in response to demand generated for cultural and political books at CAM and at Black Power meetings. Sarah White described the early days of New Beacon's bookselling activities as follows:

We were *asked* to do a bookstall for that. We wrote to various publishers and asked for copies of books on sale or return, they supplied them and we

¹⁴ Norman Smith, *Bad Friday* (London: New Beacon Books, 1985); Ruel White, *Heroes Through the Day* (London: New Beacon Books, 1990).

never returned them! That started it and we just carried on. That was the nucleus and then we gradually established accounts with different publishers and started ordering different books...¹⁵

In a conversation published in 2009 between Alex Wheatle and Linton Kwesi Johnson, Johnson acknowledged the role played by New Beacon in providing ‘an essential and crucial service to the black communities [... during the Black Power era]’ through their book service.¹⁶ The unstructured nature of this service is described by Johnson in his recollection that, ‘whenever there was a meeting called in the town hall, whether in Brixton or Peckham or wherever, the bookshops would take their books and sell them’.¹⁷

Recently, the focus of New Beacon’s activities has been on bookselling rather than book publishing. The timing of this shift coincided with La Rose’s retirement in the late 1990s and his death in 2006. A glance at the New Beacon Publishing Catalogue for 2007 reveals a general tailing off of publishing activity since the 1990s. Since then, New Beacon Books has co-published a number of books in association with the George Padmore Institute (GPI). This organisation was also founded by John La Rose. It was intended as an archive, educational resource and research centre to house materials relating to the black community of Caribbean, African and Asian descent settled in Britain and continental Europe. New Beacon/GPI publications represent a shared agenda to record the contribution made by the black British community in Britain. They include *Changing Britannia: life experience with Britain* (1999) and *A Meeting of the Continents: The International Book Fair of Radical and Third World Books – Revisited* (2005).¹⁸

Unlike New Beacon Books, which continues to operate a bookselling and to a lesser extent a publishing business, the publishing and bookselling activities of Bogle

¹⁵ Philippa Ireland, ‘Conversation with Sarah White’, recorded 10 August 2006. See Appendix 2, below, pp. 232-239.

¹⁶ Alex Wheatle, ‘A Conversation with Linton Kwesi Johnson’, *Wasafiri*, 24, no. 3 (2009), pp. 35-41 (p. 36).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Sarah White and Roxy Harris, *Changing Britannia: Life Experience with Britain* (London: New Beacon Books, 1999); White et al., *A Meeting of the Continents*.

L'Ouverture have ceased entirely. In its heyday however, Bogle L'Ouverture was one of the most prominent and radical black publishers on the scene. Founded by Eric and Jessica Huntley in 1968, it was initially intended as a short term initiative, created in order to give a voice of protest against the banning of the political activist and scholar, Walter Rodney, from re-entering Jamaica after he attended a Black Writers Conference in Toronto, Canada. During a period of political ferment in the late 1960s, the political impact of this ban reverberated across the globe and into Britain. A group of West Indians in London held meetings and demonstrations in support of Rodney, and after one protest it was decided to publish Rodney's speeches and articles in pamphlet form in order to articulate their support. The outcome of this was the creation of Bogle L'Ouverture Publications. The pamphlet was a copy of a single talk given by Walter Rodney. A collection of his lectures was subsequently published as *The Groundings with my Brothers* (1969).¹⁹ This first publication set the tone for all of Bogle's later publishing activities. It was first and foremost a political publication, and it was organised and self-funded by the black community. It reflected the spirit of self-reliance and independence that epitomised Bogle L'Ouverture's activities for over twenty years. In the Publisher's Note to the first edition of *The Groundings with my Brothers*, Jessica Huntley reinforced the unconventional nature of Bogle's activities. She writes that 'the founding of Bogle L'Ouverture Publications was based on a corporate decision to make a total break with the usual tradition of publishing: that of black people passively providing the human material to be written up and published by other people'.²⁰ Like John La Rose, the Huntleys adopted an independent approach to publishing in order to validate the black experience.

In 1972, Bogle published a further Walter Rodney book, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. Like *The Groundings with my Brothers*, this was a Black Power publication, and one which put a particular, radical stamp on Bogle's publishing activities. The Black Power movement originated and became popular in America in the 1960s. It

¹⁹ Walter Rodney, *The Groundings with my Brothers* (London: Bogle L'Ouverture Publications, 1969).

²⁰ Jessica Huntley, 'Publisher's Note', in *The Groundings with my Brothers*, p. i.

was articulated as a slogan by Stokely Carmichael in 1966, intended, he argued, to unite black people living there. The ideologies associated with the movement were endorsed by black people around the world, including in Britain, and were naturally embraced by the Huntleys.²¹ The movement emphasised racial pride and nurtured black interests. Its style of politics tended to be radical and confrontational. Stokely Carmichael himself first visited Britain in 1967. Two years later, the first Black Power march was held in Britain. Edward Kamau Brathwaite has argued that the emergence of Black Power in 1966/67 (and, concurrently, the formation of CAM) was 'of central importance to the growth and direction of the West Indian imagination'.²² Bogle L'Ouverture's publication of *The Groundings with my Brothers* was an important intervention in the raising of revolutionary black consciousness and the development of Black Power. It made two specifically Black Power speeches – 'Black Power, a basic understanding' and 'Black Power – its relevance to the West Indies' – available to an increasingly receptive audience. The publication of these texts also had resonance with New Beacon's contemporaneous publication of Adolph Edward's book about Marcus Garvey. Together, these publications reflected a growing interest in Black Power literature at the time. Bogle's radical political focus, however, set this publisher apart from New Beacon Books which had a slightly different, and more intellectual, orientation.

Neither publisher had their publications reviewed in the mainstream literary press. Small minority publishers without the means for self-promotion were easily overlooked in the regular round-up of books that appeared in the national newspapers.²³ Both publishers, and indeed later generations of black publishers, resorted instead to alternative means by which to promote their titles. Despite their unorthodoxy, these measures were often effective. At the launch of the Huntley archive (held at the London Metropolitan Archives

²¹ Philippa Ireland, 'Conversation with Eric and Jessica Huntley', recorded 9 January 2007. See Appendix 3, below, pp. 240-246.

²² Edward Kamau Brathwaite, 'Timehri', in *Black British Culture and Society*, ed. by Kwesi Owusu (London: Routledge, 1970), pp. 43-48 (p. 46).

²³ Alastair Niven, 'Black British Writing: The Struggle for Recognition', in *Crisis and Creativity in the New Literatures in English*, ed. by Geoffrey Davis and Hena Maes-Jelinek (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1990), pp. 325-332 (p. 325).

in February 2006) Eric and Jessica Huntley described how *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, for example, sold a staggering 40,000 copies without the assistance of the national reviewing media. Jessica Huntley has recalled on more than one occasion how Bogle 'never relied upon the media to sell [their] books'.²⁴ Some of the alternative methods employed by Bogle in order to market and distribute their publications included drumming up interest in clubs and at parties, local advertising and book launches, promotion in black interest magazines and newspapers, as well as word of mouth.

Bogle L'Ouverture's publication of Rodney's books was a political statement. It was followed by the publication of other material about Africa and people of African descent; fiction and poetry of the Caribbean; and books by, for and about British-born Afro-Caribbeans. Of particular relevance to this thesis is Bogle L'Ouverture's publication of *Railton Blues* by David Simon in 1983.²⁵ Alongside *Bad Friday*, this novel was one of the first to reflect the black British experience. A novel about a West Indian family in Britain and set in South East London, the story centres on preparations for a community street party. Despite it appearing to be a 'promising start' to David Simon's literary career, it did not achieve any degree of critical or commercial success.²⁶ This may be due in part to the limitations commonly associated with independent publishing. Added to these, resolutely self-reliant, independent publishers like Bogle L'Ouverture did not always have the necessary resources available to produce a quality product nor to market and distribute that product effectively. The publication of *Railton Blues* was, almost inevitably, a low key affair. The novel was rushed through in order to make it available at the second International Book Fair of Radical Black and Third World Books in 1983; this being one of the highlights of the black book publishing and bookselling calendar in Britain at the time. Unfortunately, this resulted in a number of glaring editorial errors remaining in the

²⁴ Philippa Ireland, 'Conversation with Eric and Jessica Huntley', recorded 9 January 2007. See Appendix 3, below, pp. 240-246. This was echoed by Margaret Busby during an interview with her in 2006 (see Appendix 1, below, pp. 225-231).

²⁵ David Simon, *Railton Blues* (London: Bogle L'Ouverture, 1983).

²⁶ This comments was made with reference to *Railton Blues* by Carolyn Cooper, a lecturer in English at the University of West Indies in Jamaica, in a Reader's Report of the novel (LMA/4462/E/01/051: David Simon: 'Railton Blues').

final copy that were detrimental to both the author and publisher. This was acknowledged by Jessica Huntley in a letter to Edwina Johnson (the publisher's reader), in which she wrote that 'this particular title [*Railton Blues*] was done very hurriedly so that copies would be available for the second International Book Fair'.²⁷ In the same letter, Huntley denied that these errors were representative of other of Bogle's publications: 'we can assure you that we are committed to producing a body of literature which is excellent in quality as well as content'.²⁸ Nevertheless it is these errors that were picked up by Louis James in the *ATCAL Reading Guides: African, Caribbean and Indo-British Literature for the Classroom*. James suggests that, whilst the themes and style of novel might appeal to secondary school readers in particular, Bogle L'Ouverture's 1983 edition was let down by its 'many spelling and typographical errors'.²⁹ The poor production quality of this publication must surely have lessened even the slimmest chances that the novel had of critical or commercial success. Although production of the first copy of *Railton Blues* was rushed, it appears from archival records that moves were made at some point to reprint the book. However, Bogle L'Ouverture did not, in the end, do so. Rather, it would appear that, in this instance, the relationship between writer and publisher was put under considerable strain by Bogle's strategy with regards to this particular novel. Indeed, Simon wrote to Jessica Huntley in 1986 of his hopes that the republication of his novel would 'erase any disagreements that have existed between us in the past'.³⁰ Since this republication did not take place, it must be assumed that the relationship between Simon and his publishers foundered completely. David Simon went on to publish a second novel, with Akira Press, in 1986.

Without the necessary resources to produce and promote the book properly and without access to the mainstream reviewing media, Bogle did not succeed in launching a

²⁷ Jessica Huntley to Edwina Johnson, unpublished letter dated 2 September 1983 (LMA/4462/E/01/051: David Simon: 'Railton Blues').

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *ATCAL Reading Guides: African, Caribbean and Indo-British Literature for the Classroom*, ed. by John Stephens (London: ATCAL Publication and The ILEA English Centre, 1988), p. 46.

³⁰ David Simon to Jessica Huntley, unpublished letter dated 15 July 1987, LMA/4462/E/01/051: David Simon: 'Railton Blues', London Metropolitan Archives.

young black British author on the literary scene or kick-start a wave of black British novelists. Crucially, however, with *Railton Blues*, Bogle L'Ouverture did invest – perhaps not sufficiently, but to some extent at least – in the production, marketing and circulation of one of the first books to deal with the black British experience. Taking into account the fact that, according to Adams and Barker, it is the decision to publish that is the first step in the history of a book, there is now a case to suggest that it was this particular act of publishing *Railton Blues*, and the motivation behind it, that was more significant than either the content or the final appearance of the actual book.³¹

It was unfortunate, though, that it was shoddily done, when if done well, the publication of *Railton Blues* could possibly have achieved much more. Neither Bogle L'Ouverture nor New Beacon Books, however, should be judged on their publication of a single book; to do so would be a travesty, would belie their role in the struggles of the black community in Britain, and would fail to recognise their influence upon later generations of black Britons.

John La Rose and the Huntleys were political comrades even before they entered – independently – into book publishing and book selling. They were part of a network of cultural and political activists that have been collectively labelled the 'New Beacon Circle' by Brian Alleyne in his book, *Radicals Against Race* (2002).³² Both ran bookshops alongside their publishing activities. These outlets were more than just about selling books. Bogle's bookshop, renamed in honour of Walter Rodney after his death, distributed the titles published by Bogle L'Ouverture, and provided a mail-order service to schools, libraries and other institutions. In addition, it stocked greetings cards, posters, periodicals and pamphlets – the first shop of its kind to do so. It was also a location for cultural and community-based activities, for book readings and performances, for workshops, and for schools to visit. The New Beacon Bookshop acted in a similar way.

³¹ Thomas R. Adams and Nicolas Barker, 'A New Model for the Study of the Book', in *A Potencie of Life: Books in Society*, ed. by Nicolas Barker (London: British Library, 1993), pp. 5-43 (p. 18).

³² Brian Alleyne, *Radicals Against Race* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2002).

Both shops were the targets of a series of racist attacks in the late 1970s and early 1980s that were specifically against black community, independent, and socialist bookstores. Sarah White has recalled that New Beacon got off relatively lightly. In contrast, Jessica Huntley recently recollected that the attacks on the Walter Rodney bookshop were more threatening and included intimidation and violence carried out by members of the National Front and the Ku Klux Klan.³³ In response to these attacks, the Bookshop Joint Action Committee was formed in October 1977. The purpose of this committee was to resist the increasing number of attacks against black bookshops, both in London and throughout Britain (attacks were also made on black-led organisations and bookshops in Leeds, Bradford and Nottingham).³⁴ Dissatisfied with the lack of police response to multiple attacks on the bookshop, Jessica Huntley hosted Bookshop Joint Action, organised public meetings, participated in the picketing of Ealing Police Station, and sent letters of protest to the then Home Secretary and the Metropolitan Police Commissioner. Some national press coverage of the situation was generated, with *The Times*, for instance, reporting the booksellers' protest. Under the heading, 'Booksellers protest on race attacks', John La Rose's criticism of the Home Office and the Metropolitan Police force was reported at some length and allegations of its lack of interest in the attacks on black book shops were made: '[La Rose] said that no arrests or charges had been made, and in individual cases the police did not appear to take the attacks seriously'.³⁵ Despite action being taken on the part of bookshop owners and the community, and the resultant publicity, the attacks continued. The programme for the second International Book Fair of Radical Black and Third World Books describes eleven attacks on the Walter Rodney Bookshop between 1977 and 1983. The attacks on black community bookshops were seen

³³ Philippa Ireland, 'Conversation with Eric and Jessica Huntley', recorded 9 January 2007. See Appendix 3, below, pp. 240-246.

³⁴ 'Bookshop Joint Action: History', Description of Holdings in the London Metropolitan Archives (LMA/4462/J).

³⁵ Stewart Tendler, 'Booksellers protest on race attacks', *The Times*, 18 October 1977, p. 3.

as further manifestations of racist and fascist activity that targeted homes, businesses, meeting places, property and people in the late 1970s and early 1980s.³⁶

Over the years, Eric and Jessica Huntley participated in a number of wider activities involving the black community in Britain. They helped with the formation of the Black Parent's Movement in 1974, and later became part of a broader alliance of the Black Youth Movement and the Race Today Collective.³⁷ Later they were involved with the New Cross Massacre Action Committee and helped to bring about the International Book Fair of Radical and Third World Books. The first Book Fair attracted over 100 publishers from Africa, the Caribbean, North America, Asia and Europe as well as Britain. Hundreds of librarians, booksellers, educational institutions, artists and writers attended the event, and it was attended by over 6000 people.³⁸ The success of this and later Book Fairs was due to the fact that the organisers were able to build upon alliances that had been forged as a result of political struggles and black intellectual activity, both locally in London and across the world, in America, Africa and the Caribbean.

John La Rose in particular was a distinguished figure in the struggles of the black community. As his comments to *The Times* concerning the racist attacks on Britain's black bookshops reveal, he frequently emerged as spokesperson for this community in Britain and for black people around the world. He chaired the IRR between 1972 and 1973, and in the 1980s he was Chairman of both the Association of Supplementary Schools and the Committee for the Release of Political Prisoners in Kenya, founded in 1982. As a writer, publisher and activist he helped to articulate the struggles of black people and to develop black writers and writing. The novelist, playwright and critic, N'gugi wa Thiong'o spoke as follows of La Rose's considerable influence upon black writers in Africa, the Caribbean,

³⁶ These are described in detail in Colin Beckles's article, "'We shall not be terrorised out of existence': The Political Legacy of England's Black Bookshops", *Journal of Black Studies*, 29, no. 1 (1998), 51-72; in Sarah White et al., *A Meeting of the Continents: The International Book Fair of Radical and Third World Books – Revisited*, p. 134; and in records held at the London Metropolitan Archives (LMA/4462/J).

³⁷ Walter Rodney, *The Groundings with my Brothers*, p. xi.

³⁸ John La Rose and Jessica Huntley, 'Call to the second Book Fair in 1982' in Sarah White et al., *A Meeting of the Continents*, p. 110.

Europe and America: 'John La Rose [was] immensely aware of the revolutionary potential of literature and culture [...] rarely has anybody come into contact with this without being affected by his generous, searching, modern renaissance spirit'.³⁹ In an obituary published in the British press after John La Rose's death in 2006, he was portrayed by Linton Kwesi Johnson as the 'elder statesman of Britain's black communities [...] he could have been anything he wanted, but he was without ambition. He preferred to stay in the background and make things happen. He was a man who dreamed of changing the world'.⁴⁰

It was not just after his death that John La Rose was commended for his contribution to black literature and culture. Both he and the Huntleys have been held in high regard as pioneering publishers, and as the founders of premier black bookshops. The radical black political activist, Amon Saba Saakana (himself an author and director of a publishing venture, Karnak House), applauded their efforts, and those of other black presses in London, in his letter to the *Washington Post* in 1988. These were, he said, responsible for injecting an imaginative and dramatic body of diverse literature into the mainstream, for stirring the imagination of the mainstream, and creating an atmosphere, through conferences, forums, book fairs, etc., in which the black writer might be seen as an economic asset to the British publishing industry.⁴¹ The years between the late 1970s and early 1990s were perhaps the most stimulating for many black-led independent and community publishers in Britain. At the same time, they were also the most precarious. As shown earlier, those publishing ventures that relied heavily upon grant aid suffered when their financial sources were cut off. Many minority publishers experienced the problems common to other small, independent publishers, with financial constraints, distribution difficulties, lack of media attention, staffing issues and inadequate skill levels all hindering their activities.

The efforts made by John La Rose alongside his partner, Sarah White, and Eric and Jessica Huntley were ground-breaking. In the first instance, in the words of Eric Huntley,

³⁹ In 'A profile of John La Rose', *The Black Scholar*, 26, no. 2 (1996), pp. 27-28 (p. 27).

⁴⁰ Linton Kwesi Johnson, 'John La Rose', *The Guardian*, 4 March 2006, Obituaries, p. 39.

⁴¹ Amon Saba Saakana, 'Out of The Colonial Cocoon', *Washington Post*, 3 July 1988, p. X15.

black working class people proved themselves capable of publishing, in an industry which had been dominated by white, middle-class people for over 70 years. Bogle L'Ouverture, New Beacon Books and other black-led publishing organisations were responsible for dispelling the 'aura of mystique' which had hung over the traditional mode of publishing in Britain.⁴² The fact that Bogle's and New Beacon's publishing and bookselling business survived over thirty years bears witness to their resilience. It is also testament to their considerable influence upon other black-led publishers and upon publishing and the Arts Establishment more generally. The motivation for their publishing activities and the contexts within which they operated were slightly different. Yet, each was successful in bringing out and disseminating a wide range of black literary material. What their differences reveal is the space available for more than one kind of publisher of black interest books in Britain since the late 1960s. The following chapter considers the publishing activities of the X Press in order to offer a contrasting study of a different type of black British publisher: one which emerged in the early 1990s amidst a storm of controversy which was quite different in tone to the revolutionary politics surrounding black publishing in Britain illustrated here.

⁴² Eric Huntley cited in Norma Harris, 'Filling a Gap!' *West Indian World*, 4 April 1984, p. 10.

Chapter Seven

REDEFINING BLACK PUBLISHING IN BRITAIN

The X Press Model

The analysis herewith brings to light the heterogeneity of the black community in Britain, a development which cultural theorists first drew attention to in the late 1980s. The diversity of black experience in Britain in the 1990s is revealed in the fresh approach that the X Press brought to publishing black fiction, and in the different readerships catered for by the X Press, New Beacon and Bogle L'Ouverture. An exploration of these differences will show how the black British literary field materialised as a site of contestation between generations of publishers and readers.

A cautionary note is required here, to stress that there is rarely a clearly defined break between successive generations. Just as Mark Stein reminds us, 'writers and texts cannot be readily taxonomized according to their age or the date of their authors' (or parents' or grandparents') arrival in their country of residence',¹ neither can publishers or readers of texts. There will inevitably be overlap between different 'generations', depending on their shared experiences or outlook. The point must be made however, that groups of writers, readers and publishers have worked in very specific historical contexts. The Windrush generation, for example, shared a common point and time of arrival, and many returned home or moved on rather than settling permanently in Britain.² Members of this particular 'generation' undoubtedly passed on a legacy to later generations. At the same time, these subsequent generations were influenced both by their predecessors and by the society, the political and cultural climate into which they were born or grew up in. This chapter explores some of the differences that opened up between generations of blacks in

¹ Mark Stein, *Black British Literature: Novels of Transformation* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2004), p. 6.

² *Ibid.*

Britain during the 1980s and 1990s. These are most clearly revealed in a shift in terminology employed to describe ethnicity from the 1980s onwards – from ‘black’ (meaning the political alliance of African, Caribbean and Asian people in Britain) to ‘black British’ (referring to second- and third-generations of Britons of Afro-Caribbean descent), as it is used here.

The X Press began publishing in 1992. This coincided with a growing demand, from the late 1980s onwards, for fiction that dealt creatively with the particular experiences of later generations of black Britons whose perspective on notions of identity and belonging derived from their being both black *and* British. The X Press was set up by co-publishers Dotun Adebayo and Steve Pope, both former journalists at *Voice*. The *Voice* newspaper was founded in 1982, and as its name suggests, styled itself as ‘the voice of black Britain’. It was different to other black newspapers in circulation at the time in that it was aimed at a readership that comprised mainly second and third generation black Britons. Prior to this, publications like the British-based *The West Indian World*, the *Caribbean Times*, and the British edition of the Jamaican paper, the *Gleaner* had catered for, and been mostly read by, settlers in Britain from the Caribbean interested in news from ‘home’. Ionie Benjamin tells us that during his time as editor of this paper, Pope took the paper down-market and broadened its news-as-entertainment value, locating it at the heart of a populist market.³ His strategy at the *Voice* was to increase sales and readership of the newspaper. After he left the *Voice* in 1991, it was one that he would employ once again at the X Press.

Like John La Rose and the Huntleys before them, Adebayo and Pope identified a need for a black-owned publisher to select, edit, market and distribute books by black authors who would ordinarily have been overlooked by the mainstream publishing industry. What set the X Press apart from its antecedents, and from mainstream publishing houses like Andre Deutsch and Faber & Faber, both of whom had demonstrated a commitment to the publication of innovative writing by writers both black and white, was the type and quality of the material that it selected to publish.

³ Ionie Benjamin, *The Black Press in Britain* (Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books, 1995), p. 77.

The X Press did not publish novels like those by black writers in Britain who had already established a reputation on the literary scene, like Caryl Phillips and Ben Okri for instance.⁴ Nor did the X Press publish the kinds of books seen in the catalogues of New Beacon Books or Bogle L'Ouverture. Instead, the X Press quickly earned a reputation for publishing sensationalist paperback books that became known as 'Yardie novels': a form of gritty pulp fiction that apparently epitomised the speech and lives of young black Britons.⁵

Like the Huntley's and John La Rose with Sarah White, the X Press initially used non-traditional outlets to sell their books (newsagents, market stalls, hairdressers and record shops, for example).⁶ The X Press is also listed as an exhibitor at both the eleventh and twelfth International Book Fairs of Radical Black and Third World Books, in 1993 and 1995.⁷ This fact alone reinforces what has been said about the wide ranging scope of the Book Fairs, their mass appeal and their importance as a means by which publishers could engage directly with the black community in Britain.

The first X Press publication was *Yardie* by Victor Headley (1992), a graphic underworld tale of drug-dealing and gang warfare in inner city London. *Yardie* chronicles

⁴ Caryl Phillips, born in St. Kitts, was brought to Britain with his family at the age of four months. His first novel, *The Final Passage*, was published by Faber in 1985. He was named Sunday Times Young Writer of the Year in 1992 and was on the 1993 Granta list of Best of Young British Writers. He was the recipient of Britain's oldest literary award, the James Tait Black Memorial Prize, for *Crossing the River* (published by Bloomsbury) in 1993. (See *Caryl Phillips – Official Website*. Available: <http://www.carylphillips.com/cv.html> [12th November 2009] for more information. The Nigerian novelist and poet, Ben Okri, spent his early childhood in Britain, returning to Nigeria in aged nine. He later came back to Britain to study and to live. His acclaimed novel, *The Famished Road* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1991), won 1991 Booker Prize for Fiction and a host of other literary awards, including the 1993 Chianti Ruffino-Antico Fattore International Literary Prize and the Italian Premio Grinzane Cavour in 1994. (See *Contemporary Writers: Ben Okri*, The British Council. Available: <http://www.contemporarywriters.com/authors/?p=auth82> [12 November 2009] for more information).

⁵ See Curdella Forbes, 'X Press Publications: Pop Culture, "Pop Lit" and Caribbean Literary Criticism: An Essay of Provocation' *Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal*, 4, no. 1 (Spring 2006) and Simon Prosser, 'The Way Ahead for Black British Writing', *The Sunday Telegraph*, 11 July 1993, p. 10. Both of these articles specifically describe the X Press as a 'grassroots' publishing outfit.

⁶ See Claire Hynes, 'Black book revolution takes word to the street', *The Observer*, 2 May 1993, p. 3; Mike Phillips, 'Invisible Ink', *Guardian*, 29 June 1993, Features, p. 4; and Gary Younge, 'Paperbacks: Original', *The Guardian*, 2 August 1994, p. T8.

⁷ Sarah White, Roxy Harris and Sharmilla Beezmohun, *A Meeting of the Continents: The International Book Fair of Radical and Third World Books - Revisited* (New Beacon Books, 2005), pp. 478, 516.

the rise and fall of crack-dealer 'D', from Jamaican street hustler and drugs mule to North London gangster.⁸ Its success has become legendary within publishing circles in spite of, or perhaps more appropriately because of, the lack of attention initially paid to it by the mainstream press. In 1992, Steve Pope was quoted in *The Times* as saying "'we've never had a review, just pieces in magazines'"⁹ The marketing techniques used by the X Press to promote *Yardie* were described as being 'more associated with indie record labels than publishing houses' by journalist, Leo Burley, in 1992.¹⁰ They included Pope and Adebayo driving around and canvassing in major UK cities in order to advertise and distribute the novel.¹¹

According to trade journal *The Bookseller*, in its first year alone *Yardie* sold 12,000 copies.¹² It was later taken on by Pan, a mainstream paperback publisher. Its success was largely due to the vigorous street-level publicity campaign, the X Press's use of non-traditional sales outlets, and its word of mouth reputation. Not only did *Yardie* achieve success in the UK, it also made an impression on the book market in the United States. *Yardie* was reviewed in the US trade journal, *Publishers Weekly*, in 1993 where it was described as bringing 'London's Jamaican community to life on the page'.¹³ *Yardie* was the first in a trilogy of books by Headley that dealt with the London crime scene, the next two being *Excess* (1993) and *Yush!* (1994).¹⁴ On the whole, contemporary mainstream media interest in the *Yardie* trilogy tended to focus on the street credibility of the novels, their portrayal and apparent celebration of drug-related crime, and their usefulness to the police in helping to increase their understanding of the London criminal underworld.¹⁵

⁸ Victor Headley, *Yardie* (London: The X Press, 1992; London: Pan, 1993).

⁹ Geoffrey Wansell, 'Media Mole', *The Times*, 7 July 1992.

¹⁰ Leo Burley, 'Word dealers', *The Independent*, 1992, p. 9.

¹¹ Hynes, 'Black book revolution takes word to the street'.

¹² See 'X Press route to success', *The Bookseller*, 1 March 1996, p. 55.

¹³ 'Yardie: Book Review', *Publishers Weekly*, 240, no. 35 (1993), p. 78.

¹⁴ Victor Headley, *Excess* (London: The X Press, 1993); Victor Headley, *Yush!* (London: The X Press, 1994).

¹⁵ See Toby Clements, 'Yardie Country', *The Daily Telegraph*, 14 July 2001, p. 4; Gary Younge, 'Paperbacks: Original'; Joe Joseph, 'Street authors tell it how it is', *The Times*, 21 July 1993, p. 4.

Yardie epitomised subsequent X Press publications, which were primarily pitched at a youthful, streetwise black mass-market. Following its success, the X Press went on to commission a number of previously unknown authors. These authors were heavily influenced by contemporary street culture and often inspired by music rather than any literary tradition. In doing so, the X Press provided a means by which some aspiring black British novelists could discuss the issues confronting black men and women and could write explicitly about relationships. The X Press Catalogue 6 lists a number of novels written along these lines. These include crime thrillers by Donald Gorgon (*Cop Killer* (1997)), Peter Kalu (*Lick Shot* (1993), *Professor X* (1995) and *Yard Dogs* (2001)), and Karline Smith (*Moss Side Massive* (1994) and *Full Crew* (2004)) and Alex Wheatle with Mark Parham (*Checkers* (2003)); popular fiction by Patrick Augustus (the *Baby Father* series which portrays the lives of four black men coming to terms with fatherhood and its responsibilities); and Sheri Campbell's raunchy relationship novels *Rude Gal* (1997) and *Wicked in Bed* (1995).

Alongside these mass market fiction titles, the X Press went on to diversify its operations and began publishing black classic texts, including *The African* by Olaudah Equiano,¹⁶ which was first published as *The interesting narrative of the life of O. Equiano, or G. Vassa, the African ... written by himself* in 1789, and books for children.¹⁷ It also created a more literary imprint, Nia, and 20/20, an imprint for avant-garde writing. Within this imprint some of the 'Alternative Reads' featured in the X Press Catalogue Number 6 include Nick Barley's fictional 24 hours in the life of a London hoodlum, *Curvy Lovebox* (1997) and *Prince of Darkness* (2005), a jazz inspired novel by Walter Ellis. On the whole however, the X Press remained focussed on specific markets, comprising youthful, street-wise black males and young black women aged between 25-35 years of age. According to

¹⁶ Olaudah Equiano, *The African: the Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* (London: Black Classics, 1998).

¹⁷ Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of O. Equiano, or G. Vassa, the African ... written by himself*. (London, 1789).

Loretta Collins, the X Press also courted readers from the educated, upwardly mobile thirty-something group and music magazine fans.¹⁸

Collins's assessment of the X Press's publishing strategy was confirmed by Steve Pope himself at a cultural event held at the Karamel Club in London in 2006, *Black British and Proud*. Here, he was not ashamed to admit that the X Press identified and exploited a gap in the market for black popular writing in the UK. It was not just Yardie-style novels that proved viable publishing opportunities for the X Press. Other popular fiction titles aimed at specific groups of readers were equally as successful, at least according to unsubstantiated figures provided by Steve Pope to the media. For example, in the *Bookseller* in 1996, Pope declared that 'we knew that *Babyfather* would do really well, and we printed 10,000 copies. [...] Within a week, we got another 10,000 order. I think Books Etc. in Oxford Street said it was their second bestselling title of the year'.¹⁹

The period from 1979-1990, which has come to be known as 'The Thatcher Era', was a time of great social and economic change. In accordance with the more 'consumer-capitalist' mood of the era, the X Press deliberately pitched its publications at young black Britons in order to exploit previously untapped markets. This explicitly commercial orientation and populist approach of the X Press is in direct contrast with that of New Beacon and Bogle L'Ouverture. This approach was made clearly apparent in a *Bookseller* article in which Steve Pope acknowledged that X Press titles were, on the whole, published for their entertainment value, rather than their literary quality: they are, he said, 'not the sort that benefit from public readings or interviews'.²⁰ Adebayo and Pope's justification for avoiding more literary fiction was that 'black people don't *read* that stuff'.²¹

¹⁸ Loretta Collins, 'Ragamuffin cultural studies: X Press novels' Yardies and cop killers put Britain on trial', *Small Axe*, 5, no. 1 (March 2001).

¹⁹ In 'X Press route to success'.

²⁰ 'X Press route to success'.

²¹ Quoted in Prosser, 'The Way Ahead for Black British Writing' (1993).

Remembering McDonald's appropriation of Bourdieu's concept of the field of cultural production into his model for the study of Book History, it is possible to see Adebayo's and Pope's comments as signifying the role played by each agent within the literary field as a broker of 'cultural legitimacy and generational imperatives'.²² When Adebayo and Pope's position within the field is set against that of a representative from the previous cohort of black publishers in Britain, this particular field clearly becomes a site of contestation between generations. Bourdieu provides us with a way considering the different positions and dispositions of the agents involved in the creation of a text:

To understand the practices of writers and artists, and not least their products, entails understanding that they are the result of the meeting of two histories: the history of the positions that they occupy and the history of their dispositions. Although position helps to shape dispositions, the latter, in so far as they are the product of independent conditions, have an existence and efficacy of their own and can help to shape positions.²³

Mary Hammond explains that this meeting of two histories includes the social and political conditions with which consumers and producers are surrounded.²⁴ In the following example of one person's reaction to the publication of *Cop Killer* by the X Press in 1994, all of the features identified by Bourdieu, and later by McDonald and Hammond are exhibited.²⁵

The publicity campaign for *Cop Killer* involved sending bullets through the post to news editors and book editors with press releases for the novel. This publicity stunt was described at best as 'a misjudgement', 'a lapse in taste' and 'the result of naivety rather than of cynicism'.²⁶ Less generously, it was slated by Darcus Howe in his role as 'Devil's

²² Peter McDonald, 'Implicit Structures and Explicit Interactions: Pierre Bourdieu and the History of the Book', *The Library*, 19, no. 2 (1997), pp. 105-121 (p. 120).

²³ Pierre Bourdieu, 'The Field of Cultural Production', in *The Book History Reader*, ed. by David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 77-99 (p. 89).

²⁴ Mary Hammond, *Reading, Publishing and the Formation of Literary Taste in England, 1880-1914* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), p. 158.

²⁵ Donald Gorgon, *Cop Killer* (London: X Press, 1994).

²⁶ 'X Press route to success' (1996).

Advocate' for the Channel 4 current affairs programme of the same name. In this programme Howe attacked Adebayo and Pope's 'cynical marketing strategy' as a stunt by 'two barrow boys of literature'.²⁷ He went on to declare *Cop Killer* as 'absolute nonsense as literature' and bemoaned the lack of social responsibility shown by the book's publishers and the damaging effect of the publication of Yardie style novels upon community relations in black Britain. The content, style, and editing of books like *Yardie* and *Cop Killer* came under fierce criticism from Howe, himself a former publisher at *Race Today*.

Howe's publishing activities took place within a very different historical context to those of Adebayo and Pope. Howe has earned a reputation as an outspoken writer, broadcaster and social commentator. Politically active since the '60s, he has been a regular columnist for *New Statesman* magazine, and is no stranger to controversy. He was a leading figure at the *Race Today* collective, and a founding organiser of the International Book Fair of Radical Black and Third World books. Alleyne describes how the *Race Today* collective exemplified a particular kind of black political activity that arose in the 1960s. This was imbued with a radical and, at times, revolutionary tone. At *Race Today*, Howe was concerned with publishing a record of the struggles waged by blacks in Britain during the mid-1970s and early 1980s. He stated his personal editorial policy as follows in the programme to the first Book Fair: 'Our task is to record and recognise the struggle of those emerging forces (of black revolt) as manifestations of the revolutionary potential of the black population'.²⁸ Along with comrades at New Beacon Books and Bogle L'Ouverture, Howe endeavoured to feed a revolutionary upsurge in the demand for knowledge emanating from the black community in Britain.

The X Press, on the other hand, was set up in an era of entrepreneurship as a commercial operation to publish books intended for a very different, well-defined niche market. In his defence, Dotun Adebayo argued that the X Press was forging a new tradition

²⁷ Channel 4, 'Devil's Advocate' (10 August 1994).

²⁸ White et al., *A Meeting of the Continents*.

of black literature. This tradition encompassed an abundance of sex, drugs and violence which, it was claimed, appealed to a young, black metropolitan readership. Taking Howe's reaction to be representative of members of a previous generation, many of whom who had fought political and cultural campaigns throughout the 1970s and 1980s for increased black awareness, representation and respect in Britain, clearly this did not appeal to everyone. As the publisher Simon Prosser observed in 1993, 'there are those in the black community [...] who would welcome a shift away from such "hard core" preoccupations'.²⁹

Nevertheless, Adebayo argued further that the X Press opened up a market for black writers who would otherwise be denied a voice. Adebayo's argument is one that has been rehearsed over and over again. It has been picked up by trade journals, like the *Bookseller*: 'they had created an outlet for a substantial number of aspiring black writers who wanted to turn their experiences into popular fiction'.³⁰ This same point was made in specialist publications like *New Nation* – 'Black Britons are not just reading, but writing too. The X Press receives 20 manuscripts a day from would-be authors and every other person in our community seems to be working on their novel'³¹ – and *Black Issues Book Review*: 'the groundbreaking success of *Yardie* bought a flood of manuscripts from writers, many of whom had never published before'.³² It has also been endorsed by academics, including Grant Farred (2001) who argues that Yardie-style novels – as spawned by the X Press – have been systematically ignored by the mainstream, yet they offer a useful insight into an alternative world of black Britons and postcolonial Britain.³³ Farred also suggests that *Yardie* 'represented the crucial breakthrough [...] motivating would-be Anglo-Caribbean writers to imitate Headley by taking up the pen – or the keyboard'.³⁴ At the same time, *Yardie* is seen by Farred as being instrumental in shaping and reshaping the black reading

²⁹ Simon Prosser, 'The Way Ahead for Black British Writing'.

³⁰ 'X Press route to success'.

³¹ Richard Wilson, 'Black History's X-Rated Start', *New Nation*, 8 October 2001, p. 4.

³² Robert Fleming, 'Here Comes the X Press', *Black Issues Book Review*, (Jan-Feb 2001), p. 65.

³³ Grant Farred, 'The Postcolonial Chickens Come Home to Roost: How Yardie Has Created a New Postcolonial Subaltern', *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 100, no. 1 (Winter 2001), 287-305.

³⁴ Farred, 'The Postcolonial Chickens Come Home to Roost' (p. 292).

public in Britain. Farred also commends the accessibility of Headley's writing style. Much of the dialogue in *Yardie* is written, deliberately, in Jamaican patois; as Headley himself said: 'I wrote the book visually, in a direct language because it's about the street and for people in the street to read'.³⁵ Yardie-style novels were clearly intended for and read by these 'people in the street', of which there were – it transpires – a considerable number. Farred states, for instance, that Headley's first two books sold approximately 50,000 copies.

There is evidence to suggest, however, that the X Press approach to publishing was not quite as straightforward as it would first appear. On the one hand it published for well defined and profitable niche markets. On the other, it has attempted to expand this niche by extending the range of its publications to include its Black Classics, Nia and 20/20 imprints. In doing so, the X Press appears to have undergone something of a revolutionary evolution. It has matured from an inexperienced, upstart publishing outfit into a slightly more respectable publisher of black classics, children's books, popular and more literary fiction. In this sense, the X Press has both prompted, and undergone, its own, cultural and commercial revolution. At the same time, it also helped to bring about a transformation in the manner in which black writers and writing in Britain were selected, marketed, distributed and received. In doing so, the X Press carved out a place for itself as the largest independent publisher of black interest titles in the UK, and was recognised in the trade press as such.³⁶

The X Press also professes to have almost single-handedly lain to rest a long standing myth that black people don't buy books. Justification for this claim derived from the fact that one consequence of the X Press's success with sales of its early fiction titles was an increase in interest from mainstream bookstores. The phenomenal sales of *Yardie* were credited by fellow publisher, Vastiana Belfon, with prompting WH Smith to set up

³⁵ In Prosser, 'The Way Ahead for Black British Writing'.

³⁶ See *The X Press regroups*, 13 March 2008.

black writing sections in its stores, with other booksellers following suit.³⁷ The success of the *Baby Father* series, which was adapted for television and aired on BBC Two in 2001 and 2002, evidently helped to sustain mainstream public interest in contemporary black British fiction. According to *The Bookseller*, around the time that the first series of *Baby Father* was shown on national television, the novel made the top five books in the Books Etc. store on Oxford Street, London's busiest shopping street.³⁸

To begin with WH Smith, Books Etc. and other book stores were commended for stocking black books in separate and easily identifiable sections, and for picking up on the fact that black people do read and for making some efforts in the direction of catering for this readership. Simon Prosser, for instance, credited WH Smith with 'sensing a market where it didn't know one existed' and making plans to introduce black fiction sections in its inner-city shops.³⁹ However, by creating separate Black Interest sections book shops also opened themselves up to accusations of marginalisation and ghettoisation which led them – unwittingly perhaps – into a long-standing debate about black political representation in Britain. The X Press did not necessarily set out to stimulate political debate such as this; neither did it, however, shy away from confrontation. As a result, X Press publications have contributed towards an ongoing discussion about the politics of black British representation and identity. Furthermore, certain popular fiction titles have begun to generate academic interest, particularly in the fields of postcolonial and cultural studies. This would suggest a certain degree of validation and acceptance of the X Press's contribution towards an emerging and diverse canon of contemporary black British literature.⁴⁰

³⁷ Vastiana Belfon, 'Commentary; Black and Asian novelists have never been more commercially successful. But who is profiting?' *New Statesman*, 7 June 2004. See also Hynes, 'Black book revolution takes word to the street'.

³⁸ See Caroline Sanderson, *Untitled*, 16 March 2001, *The Bookseller*. Available: <http://www.thebookseller.com/in-depth/feature/24432-16th-march-2001.html> [11 July 2009].

³⁹ Prosser, 'The Way Ahead for Black British Writing'.

⁴⁰ See, for example, Forbes, 'X Press Publications: Pop Culture, "Pop Lit" and Caribbean Literary Criticism: An Essay of Provocation' and Farred, 'The Postcolonial Chickens Come Home to Roost'.

Moreover, whilst the type of books published and sold by the X Press and its predecessors were very different, the unconventional manner in which each has, independently, carried out its publishing activities suggests an affinity between these publishers. The similarities between New Beacon, Bogle L'Ouverture and the X Press are not glaring, but those that have been uncovered in this chapter do gesture towards an unbroken history of black book publication in Britain since the 1960s. This history underlines the fact that the breaks between generations of writers, readers and publishers are not clear-cut. Nor were any changes to the socio-political climate effected overnight. The politics of black representation remained an issue well into the 1990s. Despite the headway made by the X Press, the marginalisation of black literature by the book industry continued to vex black writers and publishers. Author, Mike Phillips wrote in 1993 that,

the consensus within the trade has been that [...] 'black' books can't be sold outside of the major conurbations and even then they can only be sold in relatively small numbers. It is true that the critical acclaim lavished on Booker Prize winner Ben Okri and Best Of Young British Novelists nominee Caryl Phillips has benefited those authors to some extent. But their success hasn't brought about any significant change in how the trade views the sales potential of less well known black writers. Apart from certain exceptions, black writers, by definition, are seen as having a limited appeal.⁴¹

The X Press helped to forge a tradition of black literature that was distinctive from that written by earlier black writers, writers like Wilson Harris, Ben Okri, Caryl Phillips and others, with a collective history of mainstream publication. There are those who would openly criticise the X Press and its founders for publishing poor quality, trashy novels. Such criticism is implicit in the fact that none of the X Press titles have been reviewed in *Wasafiri*, for instance. An argument has been put forward elsewhere to the effect that popular fiction by young black people challenges and subverts monolithic notions of

⁴¹ Phillips, 'Invisible Ink'.

identity and that 'the emergence of a Black British popular literature demonstrates the extent to which Black people take part actively, albeit less formally and less visibly, in British cultural and political life'.⁴² By extension, the *publishers* of this kind of literature – like the X Press – can be seen as a continuation, equally subtly, of black involvement in British cultural and political life.

⁴² Elaine Pennicott, 'Reading Identity: Young Black British men', *soundings*, no. 6 (Summer 1997), pp. 153-159 (p. 154).

Chapter Eight

PUBLISHING WOMEN

The rise of feminist publishing and the development of black British fiction

When I was growing up, I must have read thousands of books in the library, but not a single one featured a black child like me. When I was eight or nine, I began to wonder why. I'd pretend that the books I read were about me, but I knew that really they weren't. Even in my mid-twenties, when I read Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, the first book I'd read by a black writer, I still couldn't find anything by black British writers.¹

Malorie Blackman is a British-born black writer of poems, short stories and children's fiction. Born in 1962, she began writing in 1990. Her books for children and young adults present positive images of black children and tackle racism by showing black people doing everyday things. In the epigraph above, Blackman's comments to *The Scotsman* in 2001 highlight the dearth of available literature in the 1970s and 1980s that reflected her particular situation and that of other black Britons, and reveal how this void was only partially filled by the publication in the UK of African American women writers like Alice Walker. Walker was published in paperback in the UK by The Women's Press, a feminist publisher (who incidentally also published the first of Blackman's short stories). Another well-known African American women writer, Maya Angelou, was published by Virago, a publishing house founded in Britain in the 1970s. The Women's Press and Virago are perhaps the two best known feminist publishers in Britain.

Feminist publishing houses emerged as the major cultural manifestation of Second-wave feminism.² This type of feminism was a continuation of an earlier phase of feminist

¹ Malorie Blackman cited in David Robinson, 'Under the Skin of Racism', *The Scotsman*, 3 February 2001, p. 6.

² In the discussion that follows, the term 'feminism' will generally refer to Second-wave feminist activity.

activity that developed during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century in the United Kingdom and the United States, involving the suffragettes, perhaps most famously represented by Emmeline Pankhurst (1858-1928) and her daughters, Christabel, Adela and Sylvia. The term 'First-wave feminism', which refers to the first concerted movement working for the reform of women's social and legal inequalities, was only coined after the term Second-wave feminism became the common descriptor for a later movement which took place from the 1960s onwards. In America, this second wave of feminist activity rose out of the contemporaneous Civil Rights and anti-war movements. There was an increase in organised feminist activity throughout Western societies, however – in the US, Britain and elsewhere across Europe. In Britain this was based strongly in working-class socialism, and worked specifically towards changing the domestic and private lives of women. The universal aims of the Second-wave movement were gender equality and the abolition of sexism entirely. Second-wave feminism currently coexists with Third-wave feminism, which arose in the 1990s in response to the perceived failures of its predecessor. In particular, the Second-wave was criticised for paying insufficient attention to race, ethnicity, class, nationality and religious differences among women.³

Yet race had emerged as a central issue in feminist discourse during the Second-wave when black feminists began to question the marginalisation of black women in general, and actively sought to ensure that black women achieved a visible presence in academia and throughout society.⁴

Second-wave feminists closely linked culture with politics in a manner analogous with that of the radical political and cultural activists who founded the Caribbean Artists

³ For detailed analyses of the feminist movement, its history, trends and debates, see Judith Evans, *Feminist Theory Today: An Introduction to Second Wave Feminism* (London: Sage, 1995); Martin Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain, 1914-1999* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000); and Imelda Whelehan, *Modern Feminist Thought: From the Second Wave to 'Post-feminism'* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995) for example.

⁴ Progress in this was slow. As late as 2000, Lola Young found cause to lament the invisibility of black feminists in academia. She likened their attempts to embed themselves in the academic world to those of a female stowaway on the *SS Empire Windrush*, and argued for more recognition of the work of black women academics, and for more encouragement, awareness and validation of the work, experiences and opinions of black women in Britain generally. See Lola Young, 'What is Black British Feminism?' *Women: a cultural review*, 11, no. 1/2 (2000), pp. 45-60.

Movement. Ursula Owen, director of Virago, describes how ‘the women’s movement of the 1960s and 1970s was, to a remarkable degree, a writers’ movement [...] the movement’s grassroots were bound up in writing as well’. She goes on to note that, ‘feminists of the 1970s found art and politics inextricably connected’.⁵ These links were sorely tested when friction arose between feminists in the 1980s, and charges of racism were laid against white, middle-class feminists by black feminists. The issues that arose around race and racism in women’s publishing specifically took on three different and successive forms. In the first instance, there was a dawning awareness of the dominance of white middle-class women and women’s issues upon the feminist publishing scene. This was soon challenged by small publishing organisations led by both black and Asian women. Attention turned later to the need for better representation of black women throughout the whole of publishing.⁶

Considering this latter issue first, a number of efforts were made in an attempt to address issues of gender and ethnic minority representation within publishing from the 1980s onwards. The first black female publisher in Britain, Margaret Busby, identified early on the correlation between the publishing industry’s workforce and its output. She co-founded the Greater Access to Publishing (GAP) initiative, with Lennie Goodings of Virago and Ros de Lanerolle of The Women’s Press, in order to campaign for greater black representation in British publishing. Yet, it seems little progress was made in this area. Indeed, the various examples of private and state-sponsored schemes that are provided in this thesis, schemes which have been implemented in order to make the publishing industry more representative of modern British society, would suggest that none achieved a significant degree of success. Rather, there has been a cyclical pattern to both their creation and lack of impact. Margaret Busby suggested as much during an interview in 2006 shortly

⁵ Ursula Owen, ‘Feminist Publishing’, in *Publishing - the future*, ed. by Peter Owen (London: Peter Owen, 1988), pp. 86-100 (p. 86).

⁶ For more information about issues of race and racism in publishing see ‘Books of Integrity: Dilemmas of Race and Authenticity in Feminist Publishing’ in Simone Murray, *Mixed Media: Feminist Presses and Publishing Politics* (London: Pluto Press, 2004).

after the Diversity in Publishing Network was launched when she observed that nothing much had changed and that there was still only a handful of black people in publishing.⁷

Busby's comments highlight the fact that traditionally British publishing has been dominated by males. From the mid-1980s onwards black feminists and women publishers placed continuous pressure upon the entire book industry to incorporate the experiences of black women in Britain, both in terms of its make-up and its output. Publications like *The Heart of the Race*, collectively authored by Beverley Bryan, Stella Dadzie and Suzanne Scafe (1985), and Lauretta Ngcobo's *Let it be Told: Essays by Black Women in Britain* (1987) are early examples of books that endeavoured to give a voice to black British women through literature.⁸ Lauretta Ngcobo is a well known feminist writer of the 1980s, as well as a children's writer and academic. She was President of ATCAL in the early 1980s and was a member of the network of people involved in the development of African, Caribbean, Asian and black British literatures which grew out of this Association and around the journal *Wasafiri*. By presenting the black female perspective through literature, her book tackled race, feminism and the book industry head on. In the Editor's Note to *Let it be Told*, Ngcobo expressed consternation that the British publishing establishment tended only to embrace and facilitate the publication of black male writers.⁹ *Let it be Told* sought to challenge the cultural domination of the book industry by white male publishers, distributors and retailers, and predicted that the role of publishers as gatekeepers of British literary tradition 'augur[ed] badly for black writing in general and Black women's writing in particular'.¹⁰

Ngcobo identified the contribution made to the production of third world writing by the educational publishing houses Longman, Macmillan and Heinemann. She also credited small black presses, like New Beacon Books, Bogle L'Ouverture, and Buchi Emecheta's

⁷ Philippa Ireland, 'Conversation with Margaret Busby', Recorded 25 May 2006. See Appendix 1, below, pp. 225-231.

⁸ Beverley Bryan, Stella Dadzie and Suzanne Scafe, *The Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain* (London: Virago, 1985); Lauretta Ngcobo, *Let it be Told: Black Women Writers in Britain* (London: Pluto Press, 1987).

⁹ Ngcobo, *Let it be Told: Black Women Writers in Britain*, p. xi.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

publishing company, Ogwugwu Afor (which she ran between 1982 and 1983 with her son, Sylvester), with providing an outlet for emerging black women writers. Significantly, she made no reference to the remainder of the publishing industry. This omission is telling, and adds further credence to the theory that, on the whole, mainstream publishers were not actively involved in the publication of black women writers in Britain during the 1970s and the early-mid 1980s. There are, of course, exceptions to this hypothesis. Buchi Emecheta was first published in 1972 by Barrie and Jenkins, and was taken on by Allison & Busby in 1974. Co-founder of Allison & Busby, Margaret Busby, described in a recent interview how she was keen to publish Emecheta's work, not because she was 'black' but because it was, she felt, important to see Emecheta's point of view represented.¹¹ Elsewhere, and as we have seen previously, Beryl Gilroy's autobiographical *Black Teacher* was published by Cassell and Company (now part of the Orion Publishing Group) in 1976.

Virago's *The Heart of the Race* was directly influenced by the emergence of race as a key issue of the feminist movement during the 1980s. Many black women experienced a sense of disenchantment with feminism at this time, feeling that it applied only to white, middle-class feminists. Part of Virago's strategy was to be aware of political developments: 'to keep in touch with the changes, keep abreast, indeed be ahead of the game'.¹² As such, Ursula Owen admitted towards the end of this decade that:

In recent years we have published fiction by black British and American women, conscious of how, early on, we concentrated too heavily on the experience of white women, how black women have felt excluded from the account, and conscious too of the difficulties for a largely white women's press in getting such publishing right.¹³

¹¹ Philippa Ireland, 'Conversation with Margaret Busby', Recorded 25 May 2006. See Appendix 1, below, pp. 225-231.

¹² Owen, 'Feminist Publishing', p. 85.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

Owens's comments make clear the fact that the Second-wave feminist movement, and feminist publishing houses in particular, initially failed to engage with the experiences of black British women. From the mid-1980s however, Virago did select and promote literature by both black British and black American women writers. In addition to their publication of *The Heart of the Race*, Virago published Maya Angelou's autobiographical *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1985), and poetry collections by Angelou and by Grace Nichols (*The Fat Black Woman's Poems* (1984); *Whole of a Morning Sky* (1986); and *Lazy Thoughts of a Lazy Woman* (1989)).

A brief examination of Virago's guiding principles is useful here in order to set the activities of this publishing house and those of other feminist presses in context. The idea for Virago grew out of the feminist movement. Its origins are akin to those of New Beacon Books, whose early publishing activities came out of a growing demand for literature from members of the Caribbean Artists Movement and the Black Power Movement. Virago was similarly established in order to produce books which were part of a specific political movement. Unlike New Beacon Books, Virago's marketing aim was quite specific. Founder and chairwoman, Carmen Callil, has stated that 'we wanted to reach a general audience of women and men who had not heard of, or who disliked, even detested the idea of feminism'.¹⁴ Virago's ambitions to combine politics with profit were different from some of the other, more radical, feminist publishers of the day. As Simone Murray has noted:

The characteristic that distinguishes Virago from many other feminist presses which sprang up under the invigorating influence of women's activism from the late 1960s is the duality of its self-conception: it perceived itself simultaneously both as a commercial publishing house *and* as an intrinsic part of the British women's liberation movement.¹⁵

¹⁴ Carmen Callil in Hilary Macaskill, 'Virago Press: "From nowhere to everywhere"', *British Book News*, (July 1990), pp. 432-435 (p. 432).

¹⁵ Simone Murray, *Mixed Media*, p. 32.

From the outset Virago's aims combined the political, literary and commercial. It was, and continues to be, a market-driven company, albeit one that attempts to influence that market in the direction of feminist and women's issues. To this end, it devised its own particular brand image. This entailed producing distinctive green-spined, larger than usual trade paperback editions of upmarket literature that ensured maximum publicity in the marketplace. The Women's Press adopted a similar approach in order to maintain a presence within the marketplace, producing original publications in both hardback and paperback with an easily identifiable striped appearance.

The Women's Press was set up by Stephanie Dowrick in 1977 in the wake of Virago, with the specific aim of going beyond the latter's initial focus on the publication of 'classics' that catered for white, middle-class, heterosexual women.¹⁶ This was a charge which, as we have seen, was later countered by Virago in both words and deeds. The Women's Press was distinct from Virago in that it focussed on a different market by concentrating on contemporary writing and modern issues and debates. This strategy was clearly set out in an early Women's Press campaign which adopted the theme, 'Live Authors, Live Issues' in order to sum up its publishing ethos.¹⁷

From the beginning, the Women's Press was also closely associated with the publication of writing by women from minority groups. It aimed to serve as a platform for women who might have no other access to the mainstream media. It purposely built up a list of international women writers. These included black American writers, Alice Walker, Toni Cade Bambara and June Jordan, and Nnoseng Ellen Kate Kuzwayo, Farinda Karodia and Caesarina Makhoere from South Africa, and Zimbabwean, Tsitsi Dagarembga. The Press also published Merle Collins (Grenada), Joan Riley (Jamaica, then Britain), Ravinder Randhawa (India, then Britain) and Guyanese-born Pauline Melville.

The second managing director of The Women's Press, replacing Dowrick, was the South African activist, Ros de Lanerolle. De Lanerolle greatly expanded the Press's

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

¹⁷ See Hilary Macaskill, 'The Women's Press: Live Authors, Live Issues', *British Book News*, February (1991), pp. 82-85 (p. 83).

investment in minority women's literature and actively promoted culturally diverse women's writing during the 1980s. She was personally concerned with providing an opening for voices, particularly black women's voices, which might not otherwise be heard. Simone Murray cites the publication of Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1985) and Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988) as examples of publications from the Women's Press by black writers that achieved significant critical and commercial success.¹⁸ As a later discussion will demonstrate, commercially successful feminist presses, like Virago and The Women's Press, were subject to charges by black British feminists and black women-led publishing organisations of commercial co-option of black writing without a proportionate ceding of institutional power.¹⁹ Nevertheless, The Women's Press continued to expand the racial profile of its list throughout the mid- to late-1980s and early 1990s. It published Rhonda Cobham and Merle Collins' anthology *Watchers and Seekers: Creative Writings by Black Women in Britain* (1987) and Susheila Nasta's *Motherlands: Black Women's Writing from Africa, the Caribbean and South Asia* (1991).

The Women's Press's greatest commercial success was undoubtedly their publication of Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. As Murray states:

Upon securing the UK and Commonwealth rights to *The Color Purple*, The Women's Press published their edition to a smattering of reviews and slow sales, a situation that improved once the book was awarded a 1983 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, and that was transformed into a sales deluge upon the release of Stephen Spielberg's 1985 film adaptation of the same name. The impact of the bestseller on the firm was transformative – turnover increased within twelve months from £150,000 to £1,000,000; new titles rose dramatically from 17 to 60 a year.²⁰

¹⁸ Murray, *Mixed Media*, p. 73.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

Alice Walker's literary career was well established before The Women's Press secured the rights to *The Color Purple*. She was first published as a poet with the collection *Once: Poems* (1968),²¹ and her debut novel, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, was published in 1970.²² By 1982, the year in which *The Color Purple* was first published in the United States, she had also written a number of essays and short stories. After being awarded the Pulitzer Prize for *The Color Purple* in 1983, Walker went on to win the National Book Award and achieved further literary and cultural recognition. She has been a prolific writer of novels, poetry and short stories for over thirty years. Sales of her books in the UK sustained The Women's Press for over two decades, until their split in 2004. The alleged reason for Walker's separation from The Women's Press was that it was late in paying Walker her royalty cheque. Her subsequent move to Weidenfeld & Nicolson (part of the Orion Publishing Group) was less than easy, as newspaper reports from *The Times* (2004) and *The Daily Telegraph* (2004) attest.²³ In the latter, the owner of The Women's Press, Naim Attallah, was described as being 'left reeling after the loss of his star author, Alice Walker, to Orion' and was 'shocked by Walker's agent's "ingratitude, after two-and-a-half decades of publishing her"'.²⁴

The publication of Alice Walker by The Women's Press became something of a phenomenon for her publisher. Despite the potential pitfalls for her UK publishers after the release of Steven Spielberg's film, which could easily have overwhelmed a relatively small publishing house, The Women's Press made enormous gains in the wake of the film's huge commercial success. The Press was commended in mainstream newspapers for adopting a level-headed approach to their publication of *The Color Purple*, as this extract from *The Guardian* reveals:

²¹ Alice Walker, *Once: Poems* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace & World, 1968).

²² Alice Walker, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970).

²³ See Tim Teeman, 'Alice Walker', *The Times*, 24 April 2004, Weekend Review, p. 13 and Lillian Pizzichini, 'Books Diary', *The Daily Telegraph*, 1 May 2004, Books, p. 2.

²⁴ Pizzichini, 'Books Diary', p2.

A distinctive feature of their marketing is that they concentrate on Alice Walker and her work, and on black writers in their list, rather than following the usual hype of the books of the film.²⁵

Hilary Macaskill also praised the Press's 'courageous and risky decision' to bring out the paperback edition of *The Color Purple* to coincide with the launch of the film, rather than safely selling on the rights. This in turn gave the Press a unique opportunity to 'put the distinctive black and white striped spines and iron logo in every bookshop, supermarket, railway station kiosk, airport, bookstall and motorway service station in the UK'.²⁶ Yet, despite their concentration upon black women writers, none of the Press's other authors could imitate the extraordinary and continued commercial success of Alice Walker.

Another stalwart of The Women's Press list was the black British author, Joan Riley. The publication of Riley's first novel by the Press, *The Unbelonging* in 1985, was followed by *Waiting in the Twilight* (1987), *Romance* (1988) and *A Kindness to the Children* (1992) (her later work was published by Peepal Tree Press). Joan Riley was born in Jamaica in 1958 and moved to England as a young woman to study at university. *The Unbelonging* is the first of three of her novels to focus upon the experiences of black British women at different times of their lives. In *The Unbelonging* Riley interweaves the reality of life for black people in Britain with a touching coming of age story of one young girl. Eleven-year old Hyacinth leaves Jamaica for Britain in order to join her father and his second family. Once in England, she encounters domestic and sexual abuse at home, and racial abuse at school. The novel reflects the contemporary reality in which Hyacinth lived, and has been taken to be symbolic of the black experience in Britain.²⁷ Riley uses Hyacinth's rather reluctant encounters with black politics at college – her dumping of South African oranges and grapes in the bin in protest against apartheid and her attendance

²⁵ Sarah Jane Evans, 'Open Space: Shades of the colour purple/The selling of the book by Alice Walker', *The Guardian*, 8 July 1986.

²⁶ Macaskill, 'The Women's Press: Live Authors, Live Issues', p. 82.

²⁷ Ngcobo, *Let it be Told: Black Women Writers in Britain*, p. 9.

at a lecture by the visiting Dr Walter Rodney – to illustrate some of the issues affecting second generation blacks in Britain during the 1970s.

Reaction in the literary press to the novel was limited to a single book review. In a *Guardian* review of the novel it was described as an ‘agonising’ first novel showing the ‘fight, not of a triumphant survivor or a loser, but that saddest and most common of victims, the person who has survived at great cost to themselves’.²⁸ Riley did go on to become well known as a black British novelist in academic discourse. Her later fiction was reviewed in *World Literature Today* by Andrew Salkey (1993) and has gained increasing attention in academic circles.²⁹ What is most revealing however, and as the epigraph at the beginning of this chapter serves to demonstrate, is that many retrospective discussions – particularly by black British writers – about the publication of black women writers in Britain in the 1980s are liable to leave out references to Joan Riley and other black British women writers (like Buchi Emecheta). These tend instead to focus on the more well-known and successful African American women writers. Previously, the thoughts of Caryl Phillips and Linton Kwesi Johnson were put forward to elaborate upon the literary vacuum that existed in the 1970s for books that spoke to a young generation of black Britons. Elsewhere, Andrea Levy (born in London in 1956 and whose parents were Jamaican) has been described as being left hungry for books that would illuminate her own experience of being born black and British after devouring all the popular African American writers of the time.³⁰ Alex Wheatle, who was born in Britain in 1963 of Jamaican parents, spoke in a similar way in conversation with Linton Kwesi Johnson in 2009:

²⁸ Hilary Bailey, ‘Books: Women lose out on the beach/review of new fiction’, *The Guardian*, 8 August 1985.

²⁹ See, for example, Andrew Salkey, ‘World Literature in Review: Jamaica’, *World Literature Today*, 67, no. 3 (1993), p. 658; Isabel Carrera Suarez, ‘Absent Mother(land)s; Joan Riley’s fiction’ in Susheila Nasta, *Motherlands: Black Women’s Writing from Africa, the Caribbean and South Asia* (London: The Women’s Press, 1991), pp. 290-309; Carole Boyce Davies, *Black Women, Writing and Identity* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 100-107; Bruce King, *The Internationalization of English Literature*, The Oxford English Literary History, Volume 13: 1948-2000 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 181-183; and ‘Joan Riley in conversation with Aamer Hussein (1992)’ in Susheila Nasta, *Writing Across Worlds: Contemporary writers talk* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 93-101.

³⁰ Christine Hickman, ‘Under the Skin of History’ *The Independent*, February 6 2004 Features, p. 20-21.

When I first saw Victor Headley's *Yardie*, I thought that this is what I've been looking for. Maybe it doesn't tell the whole story of my experience or what my life is about, but at least it was a start from which I could begin to relate to characters and an area. [...] because of publishers like Black Amber, X Press, I thought yes, there is finally an outlet for someone like me. And like you, by the time I was really into literature – even though I enjoyed Ralph Ellison, Richard Wright, James Baldwin, and Toni Morrison – I thought there was nothing there that spoke to my own experience, especially living in Brixton or my time in children's homes and so on. I so much wanted to read something about my life and what I had learned through my troubles and tribulations. That made me write *Brixton Rock*.³¹

Wheatle is quoted at some length here because his thoughts sum up so effectively the feelings of a generation of black British writers who came to prominence in the 1990s and after. It is also significant that he refers explicitly to the publishers, X Press and Black Amber, both of which were set up in the 1990s to cater specifically for black British audiences.

The recollections of those black British writers mentioned here point towards the fact that some African American writers did indeed make a much bigger impact upon the British literary scene than contemporary black British women writers, like Joan Riley. Despite Riley and Alice Walker both being Women's Press authors, the success of Walker far outstripped that of Riley. Nevertheless, the success of Virago's publication of Maya Angelou and The Women's Press's publication of Alice Walker in the UK did have a positive impact upon the publication of minority women's literature more generally. In the case of The Women's Press for instance, the commercial success of the publication of *The Color Purple* allowed this publisher to pursue its primary aim of selecting and promoting previously marginalised writers and writing, secure in the knowledge that it was financially cushioned by Walker's novel.

³¹ Alex Wheatle, 'A Conversation with Linton Kwesi Johnson', *Wasafiri*, 24, no. 3 (2009), pp. 35-41 (p. 37).

Furthermore, the increasing number of black women writers being published by feminist presses at this time was significant. Indeed, by the late 1980s the publication of a growing number of women writers by feminist publishing houses had successfully generated excitement about all manner of women's writing and demonstrated the commercial viability of specialist and minority interest fiction, including black British fiction. As a result of this increase in interest, a proliferation of small and mid-sized feminist presses flooded the market with books by women writers. Fortunately, as Simone Murray has described, the market was not saturated as an expansion in the feminist book market at this time ensured that the readership for works by women writers, and black women in particular, could sustain this proliferation of women's presses.³² On the contrary, the effect was to draw the attention of the mainstream publishing industry to women's writing. In 1988, it was commented in the newspaper media that feminist writing had become fashionable,³³ an assessment that was echoed by Michele Roberts in *The Guardian* two years later when she declared that 'a year or two ago, black women were flavour of the month'.³⁴ This trend was also picked up in academic circles. In a 1989 article for *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies*, Elizabeth Young described how 'now that feminist presses have demonstrated the marketability of feminist books, mainstream publishers – both academic and trade – are jumping on the feminist bandwagon'.³⁵ Joan Riley and other Women's Press authors were caught up in this fashion for women's writing, first made popular by feminist publishing houses.

Ironically, the gains made by feminist publishing houses in bringing previously marginalised groups of women writers to the attention of the mainstream risked being offset by predictions of the demise of feminism and feminist publishing. Since the early 1990s media speculation has continued to question the need for specific feminist presses.³⁶

³² Murray, *Mixed Media*, p. 83.

³³ Angela Neustatter, 'A cause for celebration' *The Guardian*, 13 April 1988, p. 20.

³⁴ Joanna Briscoe, 'Feminist presses: who needs them?' *The Guardian*, 6 June 1990, p. 43.

³⁵ Elizabeth Young, 'The Business of Feminism: Issues in London Feminist Publishing', *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 10, no. 3 (1989), pp. 1-5 (p. 2).

³⁶ See Nicolette Jones, 'The need to publish and be feminist', *The Independent*, 11 September 1991, Living, p. 16; Joanna Briscoe, 'Feminist Presses: who needs them?'.

During its heyday however, the development of feminist publishing houses in the UK coincided with the creation of other female-led publishing organisations whose specific aims were to open up the number of publishing opportunities available to minority women writers.

Two of the most prominent of these presses were Sheba Feminist Publishers (established in 1980) and Black Woman Talk (established in 1983). Sheba Feminist Publishers was a radical political publishing collective that showcased black, working-class, lesbian and new women writers. It also championed American writers who could not find a British publisher, including the poet, publisher and political activist, Audre Lorde. It published books on black women's experiences in Britain, emotional trauma, HIV/Aids, fiction and cookery. The company was eventually wound up in 1994. Whilst Virago and The Women's Press had relied upon sales of bestselling African American authors to sustain their support of black British and minority women writers, both Sheba and Black Woman Talk were concerned with publishing black British women's writing in the first instance, and ensuring that the diverse experiences of black and Asian women in Britain were not absorbed into a monolithic black experience imported from the USA. Sheba was sceptical of larger feminist presses that took on manuscripts by black women merely because books by women of colour were considered to be flavour of the month.³⁷ The Black Women Talk Collective shared similar suspicions, arguing that feminist publishers' enthusiasm for works by black women, particularly black American women, 'stems from their recognition that such books have a lucrative market, rather than any genuine commitment to making publishing accessible to Black women writers in Britain'.³⁸ Their dissatisfaction with the activities of publishers like Virago and The Women's Press, who were maligned for giving too much attention to black American women writers, prompted them to set up organisations that were responsible for publishing some of the debut work of now prominent black British writers, including Jackie Kay (*A Dangerous Knowing*:

³⁷ Young, 'The Business of Feminism: Issues in London Feminist Publishing', p. 4.

³⁸ Black Women Talk Collective, 1984: 100 quoted in Simone Murray, *Mixed Media: Feminist Presses and Publishing Politics*, p. 84.

Four Black Women Poets (1985)). Elsewhere, the impression given in the book industry that there were only three black women writers at the time: Maya Angelou, Alice Walker and Toni Morrison, prompted Margaret Busby to publish a wide-ranging anthology of writing by other black women from around the world. It was entitled *Daughters of Africa*, and it remains in print.³⁹

The founders of Black Woman Talk set up the Collective out of frustration with the publishing industry which they felt 'ignored and silenced the views and ideas of black women in Britain'.⁴⁰ Yet, whilst the Collective saw the publication of black American women writers in Britain as having a negative impact upon the publication of home-grown black British women writers, others have since proposed the reverse. Susheila Nasta, for instance, has described how 'the enormous commercial popularity of Black Women's writing as a saleable commodity in the USA had encouraged publishers to give space to the retrieval of black and Asian women's histories in Britain, with a view to setting up a similar market in the UK'.⁴¹ Nasta's assessment also highlights the fact that the profits over politics approach adopted by some publishers was in direct opposition to the aims of smaller feminist publishing organisations, like Black Woman Talk.

Sheba Feminist Publishing and Black Woman Talk are both now defunct. An argument could be made that by the turn of the century, with increasing mainstream interest in women's writing, the need for small radical feminist publishing organisations such as these had been reduced. Evidence to this effect is provided by examining the publishing history of a number of black women writers since the 1980s.

A significant number of these women writers, first championed by feminist presses, and who are now included within the canon of black British writing, have secured a place for themselves within the mainstream publishing industry. Critics of this development

³⁹ Margaret Busby, *Daughters of Africa: an international anthology of words and writings by women of African descent from the Ancient Egyptian to the present* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1992).

⁴⁰ See 'Black Woman Talk Collective', *Feminist Review*, Autumn, no. 17 (1984), p. 100.

⁴¹ Susheila Nasta, *Home Truths: Fictions of the South Asian Diaspora in Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), p. 184.

argue that small and mid-sized feminist presses were used merely as a springboard to launch the mainstream literary careers of previously unknown writers, and that the mainstream was guilty of jumping on the bandwagon of women's writing once it had been proven elsewhere. In 1984, for example, it was lamented that 'Feminist publishers discover, nurture and create a market for a new writer, only to have her swept away by mainstream publishers when she becomes commercially desirable'.⁴²

There is, in fact, a long list of black women writers who were first published by smaller feminist presses and who have gone on to establish literary careers with mainstream publishers. Patience Agbabi's poetry was first published by Virago within *The Virago Book of Wicked Verse* (1992), and was subsequently published in *The Women's Press, Bittersweet: Contemporary Black Women's Poetry* (1998). She has since contributed towards poetry anthologies published by Sceptre, now part of Hodder Headline plc (*Oral: Poems - Sonnets, Lyrics and the Like* (1999)), Hamish Hamilton (*IC3: The Penguin Books of New Black Writing in Britain* (2001)), and Payback Press, now part of Cannongate (*Transformatrix* (2000)). Jean Binta Breeze was first published by Virago in 1992 (*Spring Cleaning: Poems*) and has been published by the poetry publisher, Bloodaxe Books, since 1997. The popular and critically acclaimed children's writer, Malorie Blackman published her first book with The Women's Press in 1990 (*Not So Stupid!*). Since then, her many books have been published by a number of mainstream children's and educational publishers including Longman, Heinemann, Orchard, Hodder Children's Books, Doubleday and Random House Children's Books. As we have seen, Jackie Kay's poetry was originally published by Sheba in 1985 and her first novel, the award-winning *Trumpet*, was published by Picador, a paperback publishing imprint of Pan Macmillan, in 1998. Recently, her book of poetry, *Red, Cherry Red* (2007), was published by the mainstream independent publishing house, Bloomsbury. Virago published some of Grace Nichols early poetry in 1984 (*The Fat Black Women's Poems*) and continues to publish collections of her poems. Within the past two decades Nichols has also been

⁴² See Katie Campbell, 'Feminist Press Gang', *The Women's Review of Books*, 2, no. 1 (1984), p. 12.

published by Penguin and other mainstream publishing houses, and her work is featured in several GCSE syllabuses.

Appearances would suggest, then, that space did indeed open up within the mainstream book industry for black women writers in the 1990s. This did not mean, however, that feminist and women publishers became redundant. On the contrary, in 1991, in what could be considered to be an act of defiant self-justification, Kathy Gale, publishing director of The Women's Press, confidently declared that a need remained for publishers who provided a voice to the groups of women writers who otherwise didn't have one.⁴³ As such, the Press continued to publish a diversity of writing, including black women's writing, lesbian crime, and science fiction into the twenty-first century.⁴⁴ To add credence to this argument, two black women-led publishing ventures specialising in black British fiction were set up around the turn of the century, Black Amber and Brown Skin Books. Black Amber was established by Rosmarie Hudson in 1998 with the intention of adding another dimension to black British literature; Brown Skin Books, a publishing house devoted to the publication of erotica written by black British women, was launched by Vastiana Belfon in 2003.⁴⁵

The evidence presented in the chapters so far would suggest that, during the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s, small black presses were usually found on the fringes of the book industry in Britain, having carved out a niche for themselves as specialist publishers of black interest books. The creation of Black Amber and Brown Skin Books would suggest that this continues to be the case into the twenty-first century; although things do appear to be changing, slowly. In the final chapter of this thesis, the focus will be on the publication of black British fiction by mainstream publishers during the 1990s and 2000s. It will

⁴³ Nicolette Jones, 'The need to publish and be feminist'.

⁴⁴ Mel Steel, 'Left on the Shelf', *The Independent*, 19 April 1998, p. 28.

⁴⁵ In 2005, Black Amber was purchased by Arcadia Books. This was made possible by the provision of a £64,000 grant to Arcadia from the Arts Council. This grant was awarded in order that Arcadia might acquire the assets of Black Amber, publish four new Black Amber titles in the following year, arrange for warehousing and distribution of the Black Amber backlist, and orchestrate the changes required to publish and distribute titles. Black Amber is now described as Arcadia's multicultural imprint alongside the publishing house's other varied interests in literary and bestselling fiction, translated fiction, biography, gay, gender studies, travel literature and crime writing.

demonstrate how, on the surface at least, changes seem to have been taking place which has lead to the publication of black British fiction becoming a more mainstream activity. Delving deeper, however, it is clear that there is still some significant way to go before it is entirely subsumed as an accepted genre into the mainstream.

Chapter Nine

LITERARY PRIZES AND THE PUBLICATION OF BLACK BRITISH FICTION

Over the last several decades, literary prizes in Britain have become vastly more numerous, more widely publicized, more symbolically potent, more lucrative in themselves, and more capable of increasing book sales, than ever before. In terms of scale and impact, the phenomenon is simply unprecedented.¹

These comments by James English about the role played by literary prizes in shaping contemporary literary culture refer to a trend that flourished particularly during the second half of the twentieth century. This chapter examines the publication of black British fiction in the final decade of that century, taking into account the influence of this trend upon writers, publishers and readers of black British fiction. An exploration of the particular effect of two literary prizes, each with very specific entry criteria, upon individual black British novelists, serves as a way into a subsequent discussion about the implications of the prize phenomenon for the development of black British fiction publication more generally.

Modern literary prizes – handed out in order to increase competition between writers, to confer literary value, or to recognise and reward a lifetime's achievement (like the Nobel Prize for Literature, which was first awarded in 1901) – have been in circulation for over a century. Lately, however, their prevalence in the public consciousness has increased dramatically. The dominance of the literary prize and its impact upon fiction production and consumption has been the subject of a number of recent sociological and cultural studies, including English's own full-length book study of cultural prizes, *The Economy of*

¹ James F. English, 'The Literary Prize Phenomenon in Context', in *A Companion to the British and Irish novel 1945-2000*, ed. by Brian W Shaffer, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), p. 160.

Prestige: Prizes, Awards and the Circulation of Cultural Value (2006).² This book offers a well-timed contribution towards an analysis of the history and social function of the global awards industry, concentrating on the literary, film and music marketplaces. Some of the other scholarship in this area has been more specific. For instance, Richard Todd's *Consuming Fictions: The Booker Prize and Fiction in Britain Today* (1996), Graham Huggan's *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (2001) and Luke Strongman's *The Booker Prize and the Legacy of Empire* (2002) are all examples of book-length academic studies into the specific impact made by the Booker Prize upon the production and reception of literary fiction in the twentieth century.³

These recent publications typify a growing interest in literary institutions. John Sutherland's work on bestsellers and Claire Squires' *Marketing Literature* are further examples of recent research in this area.⁴ In her 2007 monograph, Squires looks at the complex role played literary prizes in recognising and rewarding value. Whilst raising some concerns about the sustainability of Todd's claim that the increasing commodification of literary fiction through the course of the 1980s and 1990s had the effect of spawning categories of novels inspired by award-winning authors, she does concede that his thesis is useful for its suggestion that literary prizes alter perceptions of success and construct notions of genre and value.⁵

Todd's monograph looks exclusively at the Booker Prize. This is not unusual. Indeed, much of the research to date that considers the significance of literary prizes in relation to black and Asian writers has tended to focus on the most celebrated authors and the most renowned literary prizes. These include Nobel Prize winners V.S. Naipaul in 2001

² James F. English, *The Economy of Prestige: Prizes, Awards and the Circulation of Cultural Value* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

³ See Richard Todd, *Consuming Fictions: The Booker Prize and Fiction in Britain Today* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996); Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (London: Routledge, 2001); and Luke Strongman, *The Booker Prize and the Legacy of Empire* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002).

⁴ John Sutherland, *Bestsellers: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Claire Squires *Marketing Literature: The Making of Contemporary Writing in Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

⁵ Squires, *Marketing Literature*, p. 99.

(Naipaul was also the winner of the Booker Prize in 1971), Derek Walcott (1993), and Wole Soyinka (1991) and Booker Prize winners Salman Rushdie (1981), Ben Okri (1991), Michael Ondaatje (1992), and Arundhati Roy (1997). These particular authors chose to locate themselves around the globe, living at various times in England, the USA, the Caribbean and Africa. All have achieved global recognition through their literature. They think of themselves, and increasingly are considered to be, international writers. Walcott, for example, Sarah Brouillette tells us, focussed his literary career first in England, then in the United States; achieving canonical status there, in the Caribbean, and internationally.⁶ Some of these international authors, like Naipaul, have in the past also been included within that wide-ranging group of 'black British' writers that incorporated African, Caribbean and Asian authors resident or born in Britain. In Naipaul's case this was a consequence of the fact that he arrived in Britain from his native Trinidad in 1950, alongside other writers from the Caribbean: writers who are now known collectively as the 'Windrush' generation. Naipaul's ambitions however were always to be a world-famous writer, not one defined by the island of his birth. Elsewhere, and as we have seen, Rushdie has argued vigorously against the pigeon-holing of authors within artificially constructed categories defined by geography or race. He has not been alone in criticising this practice and rejecting labels like 'commonwealth writing'. In her book-length assessment of the positioning of postcolonial writers – including Walcott, Rushdie, J. M. Coetzee and Zulfikar Ghose – within the literary marketplace, Sarah Brouillette explains how, while Rushdie actively courted the particular kind of attention that comes with winning a literary prize and which encouraged sales of his fiction, Ghose on the other hand withdrew from the Commonwealth Writers Prize in 2001, not because of the furore that this action would generate, but because he objected to the outworn category 'commonwealth literature'.⁷

Apart from the authors already mentioned here, it is worth beginning this final chapter by looking at a short list of lesser-known black British novelists who have in the

⁶ Sarah Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 32.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 70, 71.

past been winners of and nominees for various literary prizes. This list poses a number of important questions about the publication of black British fiction in the light of the modern literary prize phenomenon. The list includes:

1993	Caryl Phillips	<i>Crossing the River</i>	London: Bloomsbury, 1993	James Tait Black Memorial Prize (for fiction); Booker Prize (shortlist)
1994	Fred D'Aguiar	<i>The Longest Memory</i>	London: Chatto & Windus, 1994	David Higham Prize for Fiction; Whitbread First Novel Award
1994	Abdulrazak Gurnah	<i>Paradise</i>	London: Hamish Hamilton, 1994	Booker Prize (shortlist)
1999	David Dabydeen	<i>A Harlot's Progress</i>	London: Cape, 1999	James Tait Black Memorial Prize (for fiction) (shortlist)
1998	Jackie Kay	<i>Trumpet</i>	London: Picador, 1998	Guardian Fiction Prize

What is most striking about this list is the fact that *all* of the literary prize successes occurred in the 1990s. It is also noticeable that all of the novelists above were published by mainstream publishing houses. Is this a coincidence? What conclusions can be drawn about the production and consumption of black British fiction during this apparent boom period for black British fiction writers? Does this roll of prize nominees and winners merely reinforce the view of Richard Todd that the shortlists of Britain's most prominent literary prizes create a kind of 'commercial canon', which in turn has an impact upon the lists of mainstream British publishers, heavily influenced by market forces?⁸ How have publishers responded to the commercial possibilities offered by a handful of big names in black British fiction? Has it at any point been fashionable to publish black British fiction? These are some of the questions that will be explored by means of case studies of two specific prizes, the SAGA Prize and the Orange Prize for Fiction.

The SAGA and the Orange Prizes were set up within a year of each other in order to promote the literature of (perceived) marginal groups. Both had comparable aims; at the same time each did very different things. The SAGA Prize was intended as a means by

⁸ Todd, *Consuming Fictions*, p 71.

which to promote black British writers. It was the vision of Marsha Hunt, who wanted to create a community of writers and had a specific group of readers in mind. The Orange Prize for Fiction was established in order to celebrate and to reward women writers specifically, which it was felt, had not received adequate recognition in the past.

Before our attention turns to two winners of these prizes – Diran Adebayo, the first recipient of the SAGA Prize in 1995, and Andrea Levy, winner of the Orange Prize for Fiction in 2004 – one final point is worth noting. The following analysis draws on examples of reaction emanating from the literary critical industry. A range of book reviews and articles that appeared in the mainstream press about Adebayo's and Levy's work is used to help us reach an understanding of the critical reaction to their work. When considering the place of reviews in the development of black British fiction publication, and indeed their impact upon literature more generally, it is interesting to note that not only did literary prizes increase dramatically in number in the twentieth century; their effect also became more profound. According to literary editor and former Editor-in-Chief at Faber and Faber, Robert McCrum, literary prizes became 'one of the most reliable guides to the literary maze, a map to the perplexing contours of the book landscape'.⁹ Reviews were not, of course, made entirely redundant by literary prizes and awards. Both continue to act as arbiters of literary quality and taste, and are equally as important marketing tools. As Margaret Busby reminds us, 'if people don't know a book exists, then they are not going to buy it. We [the publishing house, Allison & Busby] had to generate publicity and reviews'.¹⁰ This chapter combines an analysis of both book prizes and reviews in order to provide further insight into the circumstances surrounding the production and consumption of black British fiction.

⁹ Robert McCrum, 'A Thriller in 10 Chapters', *The Observer*, 25 May 2008, Review Features, p. 6.

¹⁰ Philippa Ireland, 'Conversation with Margaret Busby', recorded 25 May 2006. See Appendix 1, below, pp. 225-231.

The SAGA Prize

The establishment of the SAGA Prize was a personally and a politically inspired event. It was founded by the American writer and actress, Marsha Hunt, in 1994, with the intention of filling a gap that she perceived in British literature for fiction by writers of any age, but born in Britain and with a black African ancestor. It had the ultimate aim of giving a voice to an under-represented group of writers.

Despite, or perhaps more correctly, *because* of the proliferation of literary prizes by the 1990s, Hunt recognised the potential of using this as the mechanism by which black British novelists might be encouraged to write and, if successful, achieve greater recognition. The spread of literary prizes had opened up seemingly limitless space for the creation of new and distinct prizes and awards, each of which endeavoured to make a mark on the literary world. As James English argues, 'each new prize, rather than squeezing out some alternative prize, established an opening or opportunity, [...] likely in due course to be seized by yet another prize'.¹¹ Hunt had a vision for a literary prize that would offer a solution to the problems faced by budding black British novelists; problems that, as we have seen, were exacerbated by a general lack of awareness of and appreciation for black British literature outside the specialist, academic and black intellectual communities prior to the 1990s. Alongside Hunt, the prize sponsor, the SAGA Group (a Folkestone-based holiday company for the over-50s) which agreed to provide the £3,000 prize money for four years, 1995–1999; its administrator, the Book Trust; and the feminist publishing house, Virago, were all instrumental in getting the first SAGA Prize off the ground in 1995.

Breaking with tradition, but at the same time maintaining its ethos of controversial and radical political publishing, Virago agreed to publish the winning manuscript regardless of whether it was written by a man or a woman. As it transpired, the first winner of the SAGA Prize was in fact a male author, Diran Adebayo (the brother of Dotun

¹¹ James F. English, 'Everyone's a winner', *The Guardian*, 21 April 2007, Review Pages, p.3.

Adebayo, founder of the X Press) for his debut novel *Some Kind of Black* (1996).¹² This novel tells the story of Dele, a black Londoner about town and self-declared ‘supernegro’ at Oxford University whose world is turned upside down when he, his friend Concrete and his sister Dapo are victims of racially-motivated police brutality and Dapo, a sufferer of sickle-cell anaemia, falls into a coma. Whilst not autobiographical, the novel clearly drew some inspiration from places that its author had associations with, in particular Oxford and London, and from the more generic and familiar experiences of many Londoners in the 1990s.

Diran Adebayo was born in London to Nigerian parents in 1968. With a law degree from Oxford and a background in journalism, his career as a novelist was launched with *Some Kind of Black*. The decision to award this novel the inaugural SAGA Prize was, according to newspaper reports, taken collectively.¹³ The panel of judges for the first SAGA Prize comprised Margaret Busby, the first black woman to work in publishing in Britain, who had long campaigned for greater representation throughout the industry; X Press publisher, Steve Pope, who had provided a voice for black British popular fiction writers with his own publishing venture, launched just two years earlier; and Lennie Goodings, then publishing director at Virago. Goodings considered it her ‘job to upset the status quo’ by publishing writers and writing from marginal and discriminated against groups.¹⁴ She justified Virago’s involvement with the prize on the grounds that it was consistent with the fight against established literary prejudices, and the perceived domination of British publishing by white, middle-class men who generally published much of the same. Virago’s involvement with this particular prize worked in two ways. It helped to foster new talent, and at the same time helped to grow its own list of black writers.

¹² Diran Adebayo, *Some Kind of Black* (London: Virago, 1996).

¹³ See ‘Novel man for Virago’, *The Herald*, 14 August 1995, p. 2.

¹⁴ Sarah Wilson, ‘Virago set to break with women-only tradition’, *The Scotsman*, 12 August 1995, p. 3.

Virago's part in the organisation and judging of the SAGA Prize epitomizes its aim to combine the political, literary and commercial. As their prominence has increased, literary prizes have emerged as valuable tools of the publishing trade. In commercial terms, it is not unusual for a cheque to be conferred upon the winning author of a literary prize; in the case of certain well-known prizes (especially those which have grabbed the attention of the media) there is, more often than not, increased press coverage of the winning book and its author which, in turn, can lead to enhanced sales. At the same time, the kudos attached to the author and publisher of a winning book cannot be denied. In terms of literary status, the early careers of debut authors are often given a significant lift and a more established author's stature might also increase. Brouillette puts forward Salman Rushdie as an example of an author whose books sales increased dramatically after the award of the Booker Prize in 1981. Referencing W.J. Weatherby, she writes that, 'the initial printing of *Midnight's Children* in England was a modest 1,750 copies, but it went on to sell in the tens of thousands in hard cover in the UK and US'.¹⁵ She goes on, 'winning the Booker Prize in 1981 significantly boosted its sales and the novel was continually reprinted.' This trend was repeated with his next novel, *Shame*, which was also Booker-nominated. This book, which was first published by Cape in 1983, 'followed a similar trajectory, selling even more initial copies in hardcover and appearing [later] as a Vintage trade paperback.'¹⁶

The effect of winning a literary prize upon Diran Adebayo's literary career was not as spectacular in real terms as that of Salman Rushdie, but nevertheless reaction to *Some Kind of Black*, which was published nearly a year after winning the SAGA Prize, was on the whole favourable. In the mainstream press, the consensus amongst reviewers was one of commendation for Adebayo and for *Some Kind of Black*, if not for the Prize which enabled its publication. Author and *Times* critic, Mary Loudon drew readers' attention to Virago's involvement with the Prize, which she described as 'having potentially gimmicky aspects'.¹⁷ In the same article, Loudon was careful to separate the Prize from its first

¹⁵ Brouillette, p. 84.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Mary Loudon, 'Stranger in our strange land', *The Times*, 15 June 1996 Weekend, p. 11.

winner. She described the *Some Kind of Black* as ‘a witty insight into the meaning of cultural identity [...] thoughtful, witty and moving. [...] refreshing to read’ and Adebayo as ‘a gloriously capable and confident writer’. Her praise for Adebayo was echoed elsewhere. Julia Reid writing in *The Scotsman* credited the author with ‘rare subtlety and intellectual integrity’ and described *Some Kind of Black* as ‘a tremendously rich, subtle and nuanced read’.¹⁸ Cathy Newman in *The Independent* was equally enthusiastic about the novel, although her praise was tempered by the complaint that ‘at times it resembles a lecture’.¹⁹ Loudon too, had described the novel as having some ‘saggy parts’.²⁰ With only a passing reference to the SAGA Prize itself, and gesturing towards the problems that had been encountered by previous black writers in Britain, in her review of *Some Kind of Black*, Newman credits the novel with breaking out ‘of the generic ghetto implied by the words “black writing”’.²¹

Four years after Newman, *The Times* reviewer, Mike Pattenden, wrote along the same lines that the novel ‘reflect[ed] a side of London unseen by many [and] propelled the urban novel in a fresh direction’.²² In broadsheet publications like *The Times* and *The Independent* reception of the novel tended frequently to stress its socio-political importance, urging that it be read for the challenging questions that it posed all its readers about race, racism, and cultural identity in 1990s Britain. Evie Arup, writing in *The Independent*, considered Adebayo ‘unfazed by the prospect of packing a trailer-load of complex issues about race and racism’ into a novel that ‘has a powerful resonance for us all, black or white’.²³ When the paperback edition was issued in October 1997, reviewers reiterated the importance of this book and the political insights that it offered the reader. Jenny Turner in the same newspaper declared that ‘the intelligence, political insight and

¹⁸ Julia Reid, ‘Myriad shades of prejudice’, *The Scotsman*, 15 June 1996, p. 21.

¹⁹ Cathy Newman, ‘Dissing the brothers’, *The Independent*, 22 June 1996 Features, p.12.

²⁰ Loudon, ‘Stranger in our strange land’.

²¹ Newman, ‘Dissing the brothers’.

²² Mike Pattenden, ‘At the rhyme scene’, *The Times*, 29 January 2000 Metro, p. 22.

²³ Evie Arup, ‘In Brief’, *The Independent*, 14 July 1996 Books, p. 34.

wit more than make up for the occasional overpackedness. It's a gloriously original, extremely important book'.²⁴

Adebayo's novels are an overt blend of cultural and personal politics. *Some Kind of Black* was a reminder of the reality of the black British experience. His second novel, *My Once Upon a Time* (2000), took a very different direction, being a futurist urban fairytale-like novel that drew inspiration as much from Hollywood films as from fables. At the Cheltenham Literature Festival 2009 Adebayo acknowledged that his second novel was a 'trickier', 'less well selling novel' than his first, yet it did receive mainly positive reviews upon its publication by Abacus (a literary imprint of Little, Brown Book Group) in 2000.²⁵ A change of publisher reflected a corresponding development in the positioning of reviews of his work. This time Adebayo's fiction was reviewed on its own merits alongside other mainstream paperback releases such as A.S. Byatt's *The Biographer's Tale* (2001), Helen Dunmore's *Ice Cream* (2001), and *English Passengers* by Matthew Neale (2001).²⁶ Admittedly, reviews of *My Once Upon a Time* were not as numerous as for his prize-winning debut novel.²⁷ Nevertheless it did receive critical attention in the national media and in the international literary journal, *World Literature Today*.²⁸ In general terms, reaction to Adebayo's second novel appears to have been one of approbation for 'a brave writer' with 'considerable and supple talent' who 'mixes realism, satire and fantasy to great effect'.²⁹

The SAGA Prize effectively launched Diran Adebayo's writing career. Following his prize-winning success he continued to garner critical acclaim. *Some Kind of Black* went on to receive a Betty Trask Award, the Authors' Club Best First Novel Award and the Writers

²⁴ Jenny Turner, 'Paperbacks', *The Independent*, 5 October 1997 Features, p. 40.

²⁵ Diran Adebayo in conversation at the Cheltenham Literature Festival, 12 October 2009.

²⁶ A.S. Byatt, *The Biographer's Tale* (London, Vintage: 2001); Helen Dunmore, *Ice Cream* (London, Penguin: 2001); Matthew Neale, *English Passengers* (London, Penguin: 2001).

²⁷ Reviews of Adebayo's second novel appeared in David Vincent, 'Paperbacks', *The Observer*, 24 June 2001 Observer Review Pages, p.18 and Olivia Glazebrook, 'Paperbacks', *The Daily Telegraph*, 2 June 2001, p. 2.

²⁸ Bruce King, 'My Once Upon a Time', *World Literature Today*, 74, no. 3 (2000), p. 591.

²⁹ Pattenden, 'At the rhyme scene'; Vincent, 'Paperbacks'; Jerome Boyd Maunsell, 'Fiction – Books', *The Times*, 9 June 2001.

Guild Award for Great Britain's New Writer of the Year in 1996. In the same year it was also commended by the judges of the David Higham Prize for Fiction, and was long-listed for the Booker Prize. More than a decade after the first SAGA Prize was awarded to Adebayo both of his novels remain in print.

The SAGA Prize ran for four years and was responsible for orchestrating the publication of a group of black British fiction writers and for augmenting a growing body of black British literature. In 1996 the winner was Joanna Traynor for *Sister Josephine* (1997)³⁰; in 1997 the SAGA Prize was awarded to Judith Bryan Edwards, whose novel *Bernard and the Cloth Monkey* was published by Flamingo in 1999.³¹ Not unlike some of the novels written by earlier black writers in Britain that have been referred to elsewhere in this thesis – novels like Joan Riley's *The Unbelonging* and Buchi Emecheta's *In the Ditch* and *Second Class Citizen* which told stories of neglect, abuse, poverty and hardship set in British cities – all of the SAGA Prize-winning novels combined hard-hitting themes with contemporary, urban settings. Joanna Traynor drew upon her own childhood experiences of abuse in *Sister Josephine*, a semi-autobiographical thriller about a nurse in Liverpool, with flashbacks to the emotional and sexual abuse she underwent whilst in foster-care.³²

A further example is Ike Eze-anyika's *Canteen Culture* (2000), which won the final SAGA Prize, in 1998.³³ Hot on the heels of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report into the murder of a black teenager in London in 1993, this novel was an exposé of institutional racism in the police force. It is an example of a work of fiction that, when published, was particularly topical. This fact did not go unnoticed in the press. In a review of the book for *The Times* the book reviewer and writer, James Hopkin, declared that:

The police have never had it so bad. Still reeling from the latest reports of institutionalised racism, they've become easy targets for book-length satires which are as wickedly funny as they are revealing. First there was Irvine

³⁰ Joanna Traynor, *Sister Josephine* (London: Bloomsbury, 1997).

³¹ Judith Bryan Edwards, *Bernard and the Cloth Monkey* (London: Flamingo, 1997).

³² See 'The Life of a Prize-Winning Author has its Ups and Downs', 23 October 1996.

³³ Ike Eze-anyika, *Canteen Culture* (London: Faber & Faber, 2000).

Welsh's *Filth*, and now there is *Canteen Culture*, the first novel by Ike Ezeanyika, a black former Metropolitan policeman.³⁴

The SAGA Prize was intended to be a short-term initiative. As the prize folded its administrator argued that by establishing the writing careers of four previously unpublished black British novelists it had achieved all that had been intended.³⁵ It had got a handful of young, British and black debut authors published by the mainstream and it had placed black British fiction on the literary map. This assessment was echoed in the mainstream press. In one review of Traynor's third novel, *Bitch Monkey*, it was said that 'when Joanna Traynor came to prominence as a result of the SAGA prize, the award was precisely fulfilling its purpose'.³⁶

The Orange Prize

Like the SAGA Prize, the Orange Broadband Prize for Fiction was a politically-inspired event. An all-women fiction prize, it was first conceived in 1992 but was not successfully launched until January 1996. The annual monetary award of £30,000, ten times that offered by the SAGA Prize, and the largest British award for a single work of literature, was financed by an anonymous donor, and the prize sponsored by the mobile telecommunications company, Orange. It too is administered by the Book Trust. Unlike the SAGA Prize, there is no nationality criterion: the only conditions are that the work must be written by a woman, in English, and have been published in the UK between 1 April and the following 31 March. Prize applications must be made by the entrant's publisher. It is awarded to the woman who, in the opinion of the judges, has written the best, eligible full-length novel in English.

One of the aims of the Orange Prize is to raise the profile of women's fiction generally. Its second aim is more obviously commercial since it is specifically intended to

³⁴ James Hopkin, 'An Uneven Force', *The Times*, 25 March 2000 Features, p. 18.

³⁵ In Cole Moreton, 'Some kind of success', *The Independent*, 24 January 1998 Features, p. 26.

³⁶ Lesley McDowell, 'In With the Cool Crowd', *The Scotsman*, 15 July 2000, p. 5.

reward the winning author by increasing her literary standing, and, more importantly, sales of her books. It was expected from the outset that the award of the Orange Prize would provide both authors and their publishers with increased marketing power and greater sales. In this the prize was immediately successful:

Bookstores around the country supported the shortlisted titles with posters and window displays, and publishers brought out editions with special Orange Prize shortlist covers. The winning book [in 1996], *A Spell of Winter*, which had sold less than 2,000 hard copies when it was shortlisted, went on to sell another 3,000 paperback copies before the prize was announced. Since winning, its publishers [...] printed another 5,000, with 5,000 more on order.³⁷

In addition to the obvious and immediate economic benefits of winning a literary prize, the publication of any of the prize-winning author's future manuscripts is almost guaranteed, as is the likelihood of the republication of any earlier work. In some instances, prize-winning books may be adapted into TV or cinematic productions. Film tie-ins – like the cinematic adaptation of *The Color Purple* – can also work to enhance sales of the book far beyond those of its original success.

The case of one black British author, Andrea Levy, who was awarded the Orange Prize for *Small Island* in 2004, provides a useful illustration of the power of the literary prize to achieve all of this.³⁸ It also offers valuable insights into the relationship between the prize, the publishing industry and British culture. After experimenting with a number of different careers, Levy began writing in 1988. Her first published novel was *Every Light in the House Burnin'* (1994).³⁹ Although her second book, *Never Far From Nowhere* (1996), was long-listed for the Orange Prize in 1996 it wasn't until her fourth book won both the Orange Prize and the Whitbread Book of the Year Award in 2004 that she

³⁷ Sue Woodman, 'Orange is a Female Color', *The Nation*, (1 July 1996).

³⁸ Andrea Levy, *Small Island* (London: Review, 2004).

³⁹ Andrea Levy, *Every Light in the House Burning* (London: Review, 1994).

achieved real literary prominence.⁴⁰ *Small Island* became the first novel to take two of Britain's biggest prizes in the same year. Levy went on to win the Commonwealth Writers' Prize and the 'best of the best' of the winners of the Orange Prize for Fiction a year later, in 2005.

Coincidentally, Levy also served as a judge on both the SAGA Prize (in 1996) and the Orange Prize (in 1997). She is quoted as describing her experience as a judge of the Orange Prize as instructive:

the main thing I felt [she says], reading 70 books back to back is that I wanted literature to be a bigger canvas, to open the scope. I learnt an enormous amount, both from the mistakes and the things that were done well. At the time I was writing *Fruit of the Lemon*. The next book I wrote was [the award-winning] *Small Island*.⁴¹

Small Island is set in 1948 and explores the interaction between a black couple and a white couple: Gilbert, a former RAF recruit, who has returned to Britain on the SS Windrush, and his Jamaican wife Hortense; Queenie, their landlady, and her recently demobbed husband, Bernard. It was the first of Levy's novels to be set in the early post-war years, concentrating as it does on the first generation of Windrush settlers in Britain. Her previous novels had more recent settings. All three had explored what it meant to be growing up black *and* British in modern-day London, focussing on the different, and often difficult, experiences of young black British women. To some extent, in *Small Island* Levy departed from these themes, creating a multi-voiced narrative, instead looking back in history and to the experience of immigration that shaped modern multicultural Britain. Evidently, her motivation for doing so was her own. In an interview she described how she wanted to look at the post-war period because it meant a lot to her personally: it was, she said, 'part of her history'.⁴² Levy's own history is at the same time part of a collective

⁴⁰ Andrea Levy, *Never Far from Nowhere* (London: Review, 1996).

⁴¹ Levy in Geraldine Bedell, 'Textual Politics', *Observer*, 6 March 2005, p. 5.

⁴² *Andrea Levy Interview*, Orange Prize for Fiction. Available: <http://www.orangeprize.co.uk/show/feature/orange-andrea-levy-interview> [13 November 2009].

British history that captured the public interest towards the end of the century. In the Introduction to this thesis some of the many and varied events that took place around, and some of the publications that came out of, the fiftieth anniversary of the docking in Britain of the SS Empire Windrush were listed. Levy's personal interest in the Windrush generation may well have prompted her to delve further into this history and ultimately to pen *Small Island*. At the same time, however, hers was also a timely exploration of this history and its impact upon later generations of Britons – black and white. In this, it clearly met, and surpassed, the judging criteria for the Orange Prize for Fiction. Throughout its history, the Orange Prize for Fiction has been judged on excellence of writing, originality, and accessibility. According to Sandi Toksvig, chairman of the judging panel in 2004, *Small Island* was 'an astonishing tour de force [that] illuminates a little-known aspect of recent British history with wit and wisdom'.⁴³

By switching from themes that were based on the experience of being black British, to the more universal, shared history of twentieth-century Britons, Levy demonstrated the capacity to write on a wider range of subjects. Her motivation for this may well have been personal, as well as perhaps creative. At the same time, implicit in this change of direction is Levy's own perception of what Squires has described as an author's awareness of 'the sense of the danger of being described as an author writing in a devalued genre'.⁴⁴ Levy was surely aware of the fact that, whilst the publication of black British fiction was clearly becoming more and more mainstream, it was still not valued as highly as stories about multicultural Britain, like *White Teeth* for example. It is then perhaps more than just coincidence that *Small Island*, a novel which struck a chord with many modern Britons, both black and white, was Levy's next – and to date most successful – novel.

A survey of some of the later reviews of Levy's fiction and the profiles of her that appeared in the press around the time of her prize-winning success in 2004 reveals how reviewers of her fiction laid particular emphasis on the accessibility and mass appeal of her

⁴³ In Louise Jury, 'Story of Jamaican Immigrants Wins Orange Prize for Levy', *The Independent*, 9 June 2004, p. 9.

⁴⁴ Claire Squires, *Marketing Literature: The Making of Contemporary Writing in Britain* (London: Palgrave, 2009), p. 73.

work, factors that evidently were in keeping with the judging criteria for the Orange Prize. *Fruit of the Lemon* was described as being ‘written in an accessible, friendly style’,⁴⁵ and Levy’s writing was considered ‘so appealing’ because of ‘her even-handedness’.⁴⁶ Besides these claims to universal appeal, Levy and her reviewers often appeared at pains to stress that her books, whilst dealing with issues of prejudice, identity and black pride are primarily about people, history and family life. Levy, for instance, was quoted in *The Guardian* as saying, ‘None of my books is just about race [...] They’re about people and history’.⁴⁷

Reviews of all of Levy’s works of fiction were on the whole very positive, yet it had taken a long time for her to find first an agent and then a publisher for her work. Levy has been quoted as saying that publishers’ reluctance to take on her fiction was due to the fact the ‘they thought the book was only going to sell to black people’.⁴⁸ But as further analysis will show, mainstream reaction to her first and subsequent novels was encouraging, and in fact *Every Light in the House Burnin’*, *Never Far From Nowhere* and *Fruit of the Lemon* ‘did sell well to a diverse readership [and] they continue to sell in new editions, and are used in schools.’⁴⁹ Since these observations were made in *The Bookseller* in 2003, texts by Andrea Levy have been included in a list of contemporary works suitable for study at English Key Stage 4 (14-16 year olds) of the National Curriculum 2007. Levy’s appearance in this list might be due to any number of reasons, but which surely include the readability and mass appeal of her work. Credit must also be given to the efforts made by teachers from the late 1970s onwards, including members of ATCAL and others, and to

⁴⁵ Lesley McDowell, ‘Books: Paperbacks’, *The Independent*, 20 February 2000 Features, p. 12.

⁴⁶ Marianne Brace, ‘Please Miss, I went to Africa when it came to Wembley...’ *Independent on Sunday*, 25 January 2004 Books, p. 16.

⁴⁷ This quotation can be found in Lisa Allardice, ‘The Guardian profile: Andrea Levy’, *The Guardian*, 21 January 2005, p. 14. Other comments to this effect can be found in Bonnie Greer, ‘Empire’s Child’, *The Guardian*, 31 January 2004 Weekend, p. 32; Christina Patterson, ‘Not just different; Never Far From Nowhere’, *The Independent*, 18 February 1996 Books, p. 32; and Christine Hickman, ‘Under the Skin of History’.

⁴⁸ Levy in Benedicte Page, ‘After the Windrush’, *The Bookseller*, (10 October 2003), p. 23.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

journals, like *Wasafiri*, that were responsible for publishing and criticising the work of major international literary figures, and to developments in pedagogy at university level.⁵⁰

Each of Levy's novels received successively more and more critical attention, despite not being widely read. Mounting academic interest in her novels coincided with this increasing critical acclaim.⁵¹ Levy's early fiction was praised in particular by critics for its timely socio-political commentary. Writing in *The Scotsman*, Julia Reid declared that Levy's second novel, '*Never Far From Nowhere*', 'should be read by anyone who is growing up in Britain today'.⁵² Readers were exhorted to take up her fiction for the insights that it provided into the traumas of generational conflict, the pressure to conform, and the process of discovering one's identity,⁵³ as well as the realities of being black and British living in modern, multicultural Britain. Reviews like this (and similar ones for *Some Kind of Black*) reveal how by the 1990s, more and more fiction by British-born black writers was being received in the mainstream media as refreshing, edifying and important. Whilst some critics were doubtful about the overall quality of her fiction, these were in the minority. Each new publication attracted increasingly more critical attention than the last.

In possibly the only review of the hardback edition of Levy's debut novel, *Every Light in the House Burnin'*, Aisling Foster writing in *The Independent* in 1994 welcomed Andrea Levy as an original voice from the made-in-Britain generation of children from migrant families, a voice that did not 'hark back' to places left behind but that had plenty

⁵⁰ Despite the gains made in this area from the late 1970s onwards, it has been argued recently that work is still required to ensure that English departments and university curricula are adequately multicultural and representative. See Joan Anim-Addo and Les Back, 'Black British Literature in British Universities: a 21st-century Reality?' *The English Subject Centre Newsletter*, no. 15 (October 2008).

⁵¹ Just two examples of this recent scholarly interest in Andrea Levy and her novels are Kadija Sesay, 'Transformations Within the Black British Novel', in R. Victoria Arana and Lauri Ramey, 'Sea Change: Black British Writing', *BMa: The Sonia Sanchez Review*, 6, no. 2 (Spring 2001), pp. 127-138, and Maria Helena Lima, "'Pivoting the Centre": The Fiction of Andrea Levy', in *Write Black, Write British: From Post Colonial to Black British Literature*, ed. by Kadija Sesay, (Hertford: Hansib, 2005), pp. 56-85.

⁵² Julia Reid, 'Sisters' strife of life', *The Scotsman*, 27 January 1996, p. 17.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

to say about being British and about life.⁵⁴ Another *Independent* review, this time of the paperback edition, described it as ‘an effervescent debut’ and a ‘highly recommended’ read.⁵⁵ Foster’s comment about Levy’s ‘made-in-Britain’ credentials expresses what appears to have been a groundswell of interest emanating from the reviewing media in literature that articulated the experience of growing up black *and* British during the 1970s and 1980s, an interest that was simultaneously encouraged by schemes like the SAGA Prize.

Never Far From Nowhere was the subject of a small handful of reviews when it appeared in hardback two years later, in January 1996.⁵⁶ Further emphasis was placed upon the authenticity of Levy’s writing by Julia Reid writing in *The Scotsman*: ‘Levy clearly remembers what it is like to be an adolescent coloured girl’.⁵⁷ Interestingly, however, two other reviews were critical of Levy’s publisher’s (Headline) promotion of her second book which was considered to be off-putting and unfavourable. The first complained that ‘The blurb says that this book will “shake you with its raw energy”. Novels about race and class that promise to do that are probably best avoided. This one, however, is much longer on intelligent restraint than it is on “raw energy”’.⁵⁸ The second similarly took issue with the blurb: ‘I have to quibble with the jacket blurb on the second which describes this [...] outsider experience of the seventies as “funny, angry and utterly her own”. Olive is angry. Vivien is far too complex for such an easy response’.⁵⁹ These comments, made by Robert Crampton for *The Times*, are representative of a quite widespread belief that, in general, novels that confront the reader head on with issues about race and class have limited general appeal. While at times the nature of the issues that Levy addressed in her fiction should, critics argued, leave the reader ‘moved and

⁵⁴ Aisling Foster, ‘Book Review: On being British’, *The Independent*, 27 November 1994, p. 38.

⁵⁵ Robin Blake, ‘Paperbacks: Books’, *The Independent*, 19 February 1995 Sunday Review, p. 37.

⁵⁶ These include Julia Reid ‘Sisters’ strife of life’; Robert Crampton, ‘England’s white, unpleasant land’, *The Times*, 10 February 1996, p. WE/13; Christina Patterson, ‘Not just different; Never Far From Nowhere’; and Deirdre Chapman, ‘Undermined By Home’, *The Herald*, 16 March 1996, p.13.

⁵⁷ Reid ‘Sisters’ strife of life’.

⁵⁸ Crampton, ‘England’s white, unpleasant land’.

⁵⁹ Chapman, ‘Undermined By Home’.

angered',⁶⁰ more often the intelligent and careful manner in which she dealt with these issues was commended and, on the whole, the majority of critics continued to be appreciative of Levy's refreshing originality. Christina Patterson's comparison of Levy with the novelist and Booker Prize winner, Roddy Doyle, further established Levy's status as a mainstream writer who chose to address black British themes.⁶¹ In 1996, Patterson wrote of Levy that, 'in this lively, crisp, raw voice, young black Londoners may have found their Roddy Doyle'.⁶²

Reaction to Levy's third novel, *Fruit of the Lemon* (1999), was more divided.⁶³ On the one hand some newspaper critics considered it to be 'a humorous and entertaining novel, her best so far'; on the other, there was disappointment.⁶⁴ Fellow writer, Mary Loudon wrote in *The Times* that 'Andrea Levy has a wonderful reputation, but I expected more than I found'.⁶⁵ Another reviewer, Andrea Henry for *The Independent* which had so far championed Andrea Levy's fiction, described how the first half of the novel was 'a disappointingly flat read' although this did serve to make the second half seem 'more vibrant'.⁶⁶

This summary of the review history of Andrea Levy's first three novels shows that they did garner a certain degree of critical acclaim, even if they did not achieve significant commercial success. Significantly, it took more than ten years and a shift in subject matter – to a theme that struck a chord with a wider, modern British readership – to catapult Andrea Levy to literary fame with her winning of the Orange Prize. As well as being described as 'an astonishing tour de force' by Sandi Toksvig, she also called the novel, 'a

⁶⁰ Reid 'Sisters' strife of life'.

⁶¹ Roddy Doyle won the Man Booker Prize in 1993 for the novel *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha* (London: Ted Smart, 1993).

⁶² Patterson, 'Not just different; Never Far From Nowhere'.

⁶³ Andrea Levy, *Fruit of the Lemon* (London: Review, 1999).

⁶⁴ Emma Hagestadt and Christopher Hirst, 'Books: Paperbacks', *The Independent*, 29 January 2000 Features, p.11.

⁶⁵ Mary Loudon, 'Taking roots', *The Times*, 13 March 1999 Features, p 19.

⁶⁶ Andrea Henry, 'A High Mind in Jamaica', *The Independent*, 13 March 1999, p. 15.

compassionate account' of post-war immigration with a 'strong modern resonance'.⁶⁷ It was indeed a triumph and had the effect of bringing all of her work to the attention of a lot more readers and critics, some of whom admitted that they hadn't read any of her previous fiction and others who were undoubtedly encouraged to do so. Rosie George writing in the Australian *The Sunday Herald* wrote encouragingly that with *Small Island* 'Andrea Levy has written one of those rare fictions that tells you things you didn't know but feel you should have known. [It] made me want to read Andrea Levy's three previous novels'.⁶⁸

This quickening in interest lead Headline to rush through a reprint of *Small Island* immediately after her victory was announced in June 2004. According to *The Bookseller*:

The run of 12,000 rejacketed hardbacks was due to be delivered today [...]. Headline claims sales of about 18,000 copies of *Small Island* [...] and the book has sold 2,589 copies so far through Nielsen BookScan's TCM in the UK. It can now expect to multiply its sales [...] Headline is talking to retailers about the paperback of *Small Island*, but is planning to stick to its scheduled publication date of February 2005. It has strongly championed the novel, edited by Jane Morpeth, which beat other shortlisted authors Margaret Atwood, Shirley Hazzard, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Gilliam Slovo and Rose Tremain.⁶⁹

Whilst this *Bookseller* article credits Headline with championing Levy's fourth novel, in a *Guardian* article which appeared two days earlier John Ezard claimed that the novel had in effect sold itself with little support from its publisher: 'one clue to *Small Island*'s chances [of winning the Orange Prize] was that, with a striking cover but little other fanfare from its publishers, it had begun to make friends among readers since it was published in February. It has sold 2,200 copies in hardback'.⁷⁰ On the whole however, the impression

⁶⁷ In both Louise Jury, 'Story of Jamaican Immigrants Wins Orange Prize for Levy', and Luke Leitch, 'Story of my Windrush parents inspired me to Orange success', *The Evening Standard*, 9 June 2004, p. 8.

⁶⁸ Reviewer Rosie George, for instance, in 'Britain through black eyes', *The Sunday Herald*, 8 February 2004, p. 11.

⁶⁹ 'Headline reprints Levy after Orange victory', *The Bookseller*, (11 June 2004), p. 7.

⁷⁰ John Ezard, 'Orange prize for fiction', *The Guardian*, 9 June 2004, p. 5.

given in the majority of press discussion surrounding Headline's original publication of *Small Island* is that its new 'friends' were introduced to the novel through active promotion by Headline. In one article Andrea Levy's editor at Headline, Jane Morpeth, is credited with making sure 'that Headline ticked all the boxes for *Small Island* across editorial, marketing and sales. Bound proofs with a new jacket design [...] were out a year before publication to build word of mouth'.⁷¹

Winning the Orange Prize (and shortly afterwards, the Whitbread Award) provided Levy and Headline with an instant marketing fillip which resulted in a dramatic increase in sales. A few months after these articles were written, *The Independent* reported that '*Small Island* has bobbed about in the Top Ten for months, picking up sales not far short of half a million'⁷² and *The Bookseller* stated that 'Andrea Levy's *Small Island* enjoyed a sixfold increase in turnover in the week of the award'.⁷³

Levy's three earlier novels had also been published by Review, and were republished by this publisher in 2004 on the back of the success of *Small Island*. All four novels were designed with complementary covers that made them easily identifiable as Levy's work. This was clearly a deliberate marketing ploy to encourage readers of *Small Island* who had not already done so to read her earlier fiction. The original cover of *Small Island* was plainly inspired by the Picture Post photojournalistic magazine published in the UK between 1938 and 1957 and contemporaneous with the period covered by the novel. Later paperback editions of the book zoomed in on the faces of two female figures shown in full – one white, one black – standing back to back against a stylised backdrop of London on the cover of the first edition. *Small Island* was the only of Levy's first four novels to feature women's faces on the front cover. On the cover of *Every Light in the House Burnin'* only a young girl's leg's encased in white socks and shod in shiny black shoes can be seen. *Never Far From Nowhere* reveals the upper body of two young women,

⁷¹ Alison Bone, 'Against the snobs', *The Bookseller*, (13 May 2005), p. 25.

⁷² Boyd Tonkin, 'Books: A Week in Books', *The Independent*, 1 April 2005

⁷³ 'Orange glow: Shriver's award helps her and Lewycka climb the fiction charts', *The Bookseller*, (17 June 2005), p. 43.

dressed alike and *Fruit of the Lemon* shows a bowl of lemons carried by a lady in a print dress. Interestingly, when these three novels were reprinted in 2004 Levy's publishers steered clear of foregrounding issues of race and ethnicity – issues which undeniably feature in each one – reinforcing the impression given in the reviewing media that the stories inside these covers are universally relevant, being about growing up and family life.

Even before the award of the Orange Prize to Andrea Levy she was described as 'the most prolific black female British-born novelist' in 1999 by Raekha Prasad in *The Guardian*.⁷⁴ At the time, the impression given in the media was that there were few published black British female writers with whom she could be associated or compared. It would appear that few commentators took the time to look out those other black British women writers, many of whom have been identified in the previous chapter, and who were also published in the 1990s. It did, however, take many years for Andrea Levy to become, as Robert Fleming described her in *black issues book review* in 2005, a 'literary lioness' and the toast of the literary world.⁷⁵ Whilst these remarks in themselves can be construed as examples of overly-flattering journalism, her literary success is undoubted. Levy herself acknowledged that the winning of literary awards was certainly good for her work and her career. The effect of winning the Orange Prize was international. *Small Island* became her first US publication when Picador Press brought it out in April 2005, and she embarked on a fully-fledged book tour of the States in the same year. Winning the Orange Prize and Whitbread Awards conferred not just literary prestige, but garnered Levy over £50,000 in prizes alone and the ongoing potential for vastly increased book sales.

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⁷⁴ In Raekha Prasad, 'Women: Two sides to every story', *The Guardian*, 4 March 1999 Feature, p. 4.

⁷⁵ Robert Fleming, 'Clean Sweep', *Black Issues Book Review*, (July-August 2005), pp.16-17. Fleming notes that 'following her previous three critically acclaimed but commercially flat novels, the officials of Levy's publisher were stunned by the speedy word-of-mouth response to the popular book, bolstered by supportive reviews on the Internet, standing room-only readings and a media blitz'.

The effect of the Orange Prize upon the publication of Andrea Levy's fiction was extraordinary. Her mainstream success was confirmed in 2009 when the BBC adapted *Small Island* for national television. On top of her prize winning successes, this ensured that she became a household name. Diran Adebayo may not have enjoyed the same level of economic and cultural prestige as Levy; he did, however, succeed in launching a literary career after becoming the first winner of the SAGA Prize. The fact that all four of the later SAGA prize-winning novelists were published by mainstream publishers indicates that, by the end of the 1990s, the publication of black British fiction had moved on from being an activity carried out on the fringes of the publishing scene, and was becoming more and more mainstream. So can it be argued that the publication of these writers by publishers Faber & Faber, Bloomsbury, Flamingo and Pan, and others such as Courttia Newland who was published, like Diran Adebayo, by Abacus, represented a permanent shift towards the mainstream, or just a passing fad? What was the affect of the literary prize phenomenon upon black British fiction publication more generally?

It is now possible to identify three particular outcomes of this development for writers and publishers of black British fiction. Firstly, the exclusivity of both the SAGA Prize and the Orange Prize opened up a range of fiction by both black British authors, and women generally. Secondly, the growth of reading projects – which are inextricably linked with literary prizes in that both act as arbiters of taste, confer literary prestige and reinforce a text's mainstream status – helped to build up a community of readers around certain black British texts. Finally, the prestige associated with winning a literary prize led to comparisons being made between certain authors and other hugely successful novelists who happened to share similar ethnicities. All of these outcomes combined, had the result of creating a small canon of black British literature.

To elaborate upon the first of these, the criteria for both the SAGA prize and the Orange Prize were very specific. In the case of the Orange Prize, this prompted a certain amount of controversy and backlash, from writers in particular. Initially, its founders considered that the achievements of women novelists were frequently passed over by

existing, major literary prizes.⁷⁶ They also decided that they wanted to celebrate women's critical views as well as their writing, and for this reason the Prize is, uniquely, judged only by women. Its exclusivity is a prime example of what James English has termed as each prize's 'strategy of differentiation' whereby a new generation of alternative awards is propagated that fill a perceived gap in the system and that in turn produces yet another prize, and another, and so on; all of which aim to meet legitimate demands for cultural recognition, particularly from oppressed or marginal groups.⁷⁷ The creation of literary awards for marginal literatures, by implication, suggests that certain groups of writers are in need of special attention. For those responsible for setting up the Orange Prize, it was clearly considered that women had been marginalised by the rest of the (male-dominated) book industry. An account of the history of the Prize states that its founders 'were concerned that many of the biggest literary prizes often appeared to overlook wonderful writing by women'.⁷⁸ Yet, some male and female writers and commentators found the concept of a woman-only prize sexist and unhelpful. Unlike its creators, many deemed it entirely unnecessary, condescending and a form of positive discrimination.⁷⁹ Women writers, it was argued, were in fact *not* a minority needing extra promotion.⁸⁰

The criteria for the SAGA Prize were also strictly limited; the intention being to draw attention to a certain group of writers. SAGA Prize entrants must have been born in Britain and have had a black African ancestor. This meant that some of the more established and already award-winning black writers in Britain, like Caryl Phillips (who was born on the Caribbean island of St Kitts) and Ben Okri (who was born in Nigeria and has made his home there and in Britain) were excluded from entering the competition (had

⁷⁶ *Orange Prize for Fiction: Prize History*. Available: <http://www.orangeprize.co.uk/show/feature/orange-faq-history> [9 November 2009].

⁷⁷ James F. English, *The Economy of Prestige*, pp. 66-67.

⁷⁸ See *Orange Prize for Fiction: Prize History*. Available: <http://www.orangeprize.co.uk/show/feature/orange-faq-history> [9 November 2009].

⁷⁹ See Geraldine Bedell, 'Textual Politics', *Observer*, 6 March 2005, p. 5 for a resumé of some of the early opposition to Orange Prize.

⁸⁰ For detailed examination of the debate surrounding the Orange Prize see Britta Zangen, 'Women as Readers, Writers and Judges: The Controversy about the Orange Prize for Fiction', *Women's Studies*, 32 (2003), pp. 281-299.

they wished to do so). This caused an outcry for two reasons. It was felt by some that the prize was too exclusive and therefore discriminatory. Others criticised the Prize for marginalising earlier black British writers and the writing tradition from which it grew.

Marsha Hunt admitted in a *Guardian* report on the SAGA Prize that 'The Commission for Racial Equality didn't want it to happen. They told me I might be subject to prosecution if I went ahead; the Society of Authors withdrew support [...] at first we had a very negative press'.⁸¹ Furthermore, the criteria for the SAGA Prize reflected a move that originated from some parts of the black British cultural scene away from literary fiction that historicised black British experience or that which was set in foreign locations. Maya Jaggi, a cultural journalist and influential voice on world literatures, who has had close associations with the journal *Wasafiri* and who was one-time Literary Editor of *Third World Quarterly*, was critical of this apparent propensity for newness. She described the reaction against existing black British literature that turned to historical narratives as 'the scramble for the here-and-now' in a 1996 newspaper article.⁸² In this article she deplored what she saw as a chaotic push for fiction that voiced the contemporary black British experience and in doing so rejected its literary forbears and sidelined those black novelists it considered to be detached from the modern-day black British experience.

In the same article Jaggi – herself a judge of awards such as the Orange, Commonwealth Writers, and later David Cohen, prizes – put forward a meticulous defence for a long history of bestselling black writing in Britain. This was intended to counter Hunt's claims that black British literature did not exist before the formation of the SAGA Prize.⁸³ Her aim was to work against what Caryl Phillips described as an 'undertow' of forgetfulness'.⁸⁴ Jaggi was contemptuous of statements in the press around the time of the Prize's inception to the effect that there was no history of black British writers, and she expressed disgust at the apparent disregard for writers like Ignatius Sancho and Mary

⁸¹ Kate Kellaway, 'The Undiscovered Country', *The Observer*, 13 August 1995, Review, p. 6.

⁸² Maya Jaggi, 'The New Brits on the Block', *The Guardian*, 13 July 1996 Features, p. 31.

⁸³ This is how Jaggi described her bibliography of black British fiction in an article for *Wasafiri* in 2009. See Maya Jaggi, 'World Literature', *Wasafiri*, 24, no. 3 (2009), pp. 12-17.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

Prince, Sam Selvon, George Lamming, Andrew Salkey.⁸⁵ This sense of amnesia emanating from the reviewing media can also be seen in contemporary coverage of some of Levy's early fiction, like the 1994 review of *Every Light in the House Burnin'* by Aisling Foster, mentioned earlier, in which she also commented on the potential for original fiction concerning the 'made-in-Britain children' of first generation immigrants.⁸⁶

Jaggi's reaction to the exclusion of earlier black writers in Britain from press coverage of the SAGA Prize was echoed elsewhere. Kate Kellaway for example, wrote in the Sunday newspaper *The Observer* that

It was while Marsha Hunt, an American actress and writer, was looking for novels by black, British authors to give to her daughter that she made her discovery: 'There is no black British fiction, period.' What on earth was she thinking of? What about Caryl Phillips, Ben Okri, Adewale Maja-Pearce, Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, to name but a few? Simple: they were not born in England.⁸⁷

However, when considered retrospectively and alongside some of the critical reception of *Some Kind Of Black*, this reaction reveals that the category 'black British literature' was expanding. By the 1990s it included a range of material, from historical fiction to urban realism, in addition to the Yardie-style titles and other literary genres such as thrillers and detective fiction, epitomised by the crime writing of Mike Phillips.⁸⁸

Claire Squires examined the interplay between literary prizes and genre, the marketplace and consumers in *Marketing Literature*. Her discussion centres on the Whitbread (now Costa) Awards which are broken down into five separate categories: Best novel, Best first novel, Children's book, Poetry, Biography (one of these category winners is then given the award of Book of the Year). This particular award structure, she argues,

⁸⁵ Jaggi, 'The New Brits on the Block'.

⁸⁶ Aisling Foster, 'Book Review: On being British'.

⁸⁷ Kellaway, 'The Undiscovered Country'.

⁸⁸ See for example, *Blood Rights* (London: Michael Joseph, 1989); *The Late Candidate* (London: Michael Joseph, 1990); *Point of Darkness* (London: Michael Joseph, 1994); *An Image to Die For* (London: HarperCollins, 1995); and *The Dancing Face* (London: HarperCollins, 1997).

has the effect of both supporting and undermining genre divisions. More importantly for this thesis, Squires concludes her wider analysis of literary prizes by saying that these

use literary categorisation, both by confirming and contesting existing categories and creating and influencing new ones. They are integrally involved with the process of canonisation, both by choosing works to reward and promote, but also by defining the ways in which they are chosen.⁸⁹

This reasoning might be usefully applied to both the SAGA and the Orange prizes. In the case of the SAGA Prize, its restricted entrance criteria were specifically intended to nurture a new category of 'black British' literature and, according to certain well-placed observers, evidently in this it was successful.

In 1996 Maya Jaggi wrote that the first SAGA-prize winning novelist fed 'an incipient literary wave' of 'made-in-Britain' black and Asian writers.⁹⁰ Jaggi's comments were informed by her long association with the development of world literatures. Jaggi witnessed the literary landscape in Britain change over the course of more than two decades. During the 1990s, she wrote and reviewed for many of the newspapers referred to in this chapter including the *Guardian*, *Observer*, and *Independent*, as well as the *TLS*, *Independent on Sunday*, *Sunday Correspondent*, and *Financial Times*.⁹¹ Along with others, she was instrumental in extending the scope of literary critical industry to encompass non-canonical and unfamiliar literatures. Yet in the 1980s she was struck by the narrow-mindedness and inadequacy of some review(er)s and by the tendency for writers to be compared, spuriously, with others of the same ethnicity. This insularity was not merely confined to the subjects of book reviews, but to the reviewers themselves. Margaret Busby's frustration was made apparent during an interview in 2006 when she explained

⁸⁹ Squires, *Marketing Literature*, p. 101.

⁹⁰ Jaggi, 'The New Brits on the Block'.

⁹¹ Maya Jaggi, 'World Literature', p. 15.

how she has rarely been asked to review anything other than black books, despite the fact that she has reviewed for all of the major literary publications over the years.⁹²

The upsurge in black British fiction identified by Jaggi in her article, 'New Brits on the Block', might be due as much to demographics as to the growth of literary prize culture during the 1980s and 1990s, although these two are inter-related. Indeed, the appearance of Diran Adebayo and Andrea Levy on the shortlist of various literary prizes is further evidence of what Richard Todd has described as 'more culturally plural fund' from which winners and shortlisted writers of literary prizes were drawn from the 1980s onwards.⁹³

In accordance with its criteria, Diran Adebayo was an unpublished novelist prior to winning the SAGA Prize in 1996. Levy, on the other hand, was already established as a writer before she won the Orange Prize for Fiction and other literary prizes in 2004 and 2005 (including the Whitbread Novel Award and the Whitbread Book of the Year, the 2005 Commonwealth Writers Prize (Overall Winner, Best Book) and the Orange of Oranges Prize in 2005). Over the same short period *Small Island* was shortlisted for the 2005 British Book Awards *decibel* Writer of the Year, the British Book Awards Literary Fiction Award, and the 2005 Romantic Novelists' Association Award. But it was not until the early 2000s that she became really well-known as a writer of fiction that explored what it means to be black and British.

Examples of other black British writers who successfully infiltrated the lists of both mainstream and independent publishing houses, and who have won various awards include Alex Wheatle, winner of a London Arts Board New Writers Award for his second novel *East of Acre Lane* (2001), and Bernadine Evaristo.⁹⁴ Evaristo's first novel in verse, *Lara* (1999) won the EMMA (BT Ethnic and Multicultural Media Award) for Best Book/Novel in 1999.⁹⁵ She went on to be awarded an Arts Council Writers' Award in 2000 and a

⁹² Philippa Ireland, 'Conversation with Margaret Busby', Recorded 25 May 2006. See Appendix 1, below, pp. 225-231.

⁹³ Richard Todd, *Consuming Fictions: The Booker Prize and Fiction in Britain Today*, p. 306.

⁹⁴ Alex Wheatle, *East of Acre Lane* (London, Fourth Estate, 2001).

⁹⁵ Bernadine Evaristo, *Lara* (London: Angela Royal Publishing, 1999).

National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (NESTA) Award in 2003. Interestingly, both of these authors were first published by an independent publishing house – Wheatle by Black Amber and Evaristo by Angela Royal Publishing – and were later taken up by mainstream publishers.

Staying with more recent developments in the publishing history of black British fiction, one of the latest chapters in the story of *Small Island* provides a textbook example of the effect of literary prizes.⁹⁶ As the Daily Telegraph reported in 2005, ‘the success of Andrea Levy’s novel [knows] no bounds’. ‘The rights to the novel [...] are being bought by a Hollywood studio for a substantial sum’.⁹⁷ Furthermore, *Small Island* found a place on the list of a nationwide reading project in 2007, *Small Island Read*. This was the biggest mass-reading initiative to have taken place in Britain to date.

The popularity of reading groups and reading projects has increased dramatically in the UK. The British Council’s global book club, enCompass, tells us that these are now used as an audience marketing tool, a route to social improvement and as a place to cultivate dialogue and discussion along distinct themes.⁹⁸ The importance of reading projects has been recognised by the government, the arts establishment and by the commercial sector. In common with the likes of Whitbread, and then Costa – sponsors of one of the most prestigious literary awards in the UK – several high street brands have put their name to reading-focussed projects, including the supermarket retailer Sainsbury’s. These projects are examples of a number of stratagems that have been developed to bolster publishers’ and booksellers’ profits. James English has observed that the 1980s was the decade that literary prizes achieved real economic importance.⁹⁹ This coincided with a

⁹⁶ Following on from Levy’s international success with *Small Island*, her latest novel, *The Long Song*, was published in the UK by Headline Review in February 2010. Shortly after, it was published by Hamish Hamilton in Canada and by Farrar, Straus and Giroux (part of Macmillan) in the United States. Echoing *Small Island*’s literary prize success, *The Long Song* was long listed for the Orange Prize for Fiction 2010.

⁹⁷ Celia Walden, ‘Next stop Hollywood for Andrea’s Small Island’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 27 January 2005, p. 27.

⁹⁸ *What are Reading Groups?*, British Council, Available: <http://www.encompassculture.com/readinggroups/readinggroups/> [23 February 2010].

⁹⁹ English, ‘The Literary Prize Phenomenon in Context’, p 172.

revolution in book retailing, when small bookshops were replaced by large modern chain stores, and was further enhanced by the collapse of the Net Book Agreement in the mid-1990s. Promotion and publicity became as much an integral part of book publishing and book retailing as selection and editing. All of this generated a period of 'vigorous literary entrepreneurship'.¹⁰⁰ Since then, to be awarded any sort of literary recognition – be it a literary prize, inclusion in the list of top-ten or top-one hundred book lists, or to be one of the recommended reads in a national reading project – has become a sign of hot commercial property within the literary field.

One of the primary intentions of reading projects is to build a community of readers around a single text. In a similar way, as Claire Squires tells us in her proposal for a methodology for the study of prizes, 'literary prizes through their eligibility requirements and rosters of prize winners, create communities of writers and develop communities of readers'.¹⁰¹ Funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, the purpose of *Small Island* Read was to encourage reading, discussion and argument. According to Anouk Lang, fifty thousand copies of the *Small Island* were distributed across the UK, along with eighty thousand readers' guides which provided information about Levy and on the topics of slavery and migration. Over a hundred events – talks, discussions, exhibitions, competitions and workshops – took place in association with the Read, and at least a hundred stories about the project appeared in the local, regional and national press.¹⁰² This reading project was linked to the 2007 bicentennial commemorations to mark the passing of the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act in 1807. It took place in four British cities, Liverpool, Bristol, Hull and Glasgow, which had connections to the slave trade. Set during World War Two and the immediate post-war years, *Small Island* does not deal directly with the theme of slave trade. Nevertheless it was evidently considered appropriate reading since it was relevant in terms of the debates it engaged in surrounding immigration and racial tensions, it was

¹⁰⁰ English, 'The Literary Prize Phenomenon in Context', p. 173.

¹⁰¹ Claire Squires, 'A Common Ground? Book Prize Culture in Europe', *Javnost - The Public*, 11, no. 4 (2004), pp.37-47 (p. 45).

¹⁰² Anouk Lang, "'Enthralling but at the same time disturbing": Challenging the Readers of *Small Island*', *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 44 (2009), pp.123-140 (p. 124).

humorous, challenging and yet ultimately readable, and sufficiently renowned as a result of its prize-winning success in order to warrant its choice of book for the project.

Through the *Small Island* Read 2007, a sizeable community of readers was developed around Andrea Levy's novel. Anouk Lang has explored the response of some of these readers of the novel by drawing upon two bodies of data: a collection of several hundred responses to an online survey undertaken by the event organizers hosted on the *Small Island* Read website, and a set of transcripts of group discussions of *Small Island* in which four reading groups recorded themselves discussing the text.¹⁰³ She argues that the very accessibility of Levy's text can be seen in its enthusiastic acceptance by a large number of readers. Her argument emphasizes the accessibility of this particular novel. This is a feature that was identified by the judges of the Orange Prize and in newspaper reviews, and that clearly contributed to its critical and commercial success.

Levy's phenomenal success has led, somewhat predictably, to comparisons being made between her and other hugely successful early twenty-first century black and Asian British novelists, like Zadie Smith and Monica Ali.¹⁰⁴ Summing up ten years as Literary Editor of a national newspaper in 2008, Robert McCrum referred to the impact made by Zadie Smith upon the book industry.¹⁰⁵ Smith's instant, international success, he says, set publishers 'on the alert for a new generation of writers to join the likes of literary novelists Hari Kunzru, Monica Ali, Kiran Desai, Peter Ho Davies and Ali Smith', and for 'the next Zadie Smith'. His observations encapsulate publishers' drive for instant commercial reward and their propensity to follow in the footsteps of proven market successes, a failing that was picked up on by Margaret Busby when she described the exact same tendency to look for 'the next Zadie Smith' or 'the next Monica Ali'. The problem with trends like this,

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

¹⁰⁴ In 2000 and 2001 Zadie Smith received the 2000 EMMA (BT Ethnic and Multicultural Media Award) for Best Book/Novel for *White Teeth*; the 2000 EMMA for Best Female Media Newcomer; the 2000 *Guardian* First Book Award (previously the *Guardian* Fiction Prize); the 2000 James Tait Black Memorial Prize (for fiction); the 2001 Commonwealth Writers Prize (Overall Winner, Best First Book); and the 2001 WH Smith Award for Best New Talent. Smith was also shortlisted for the 2000 *Mail on Sunday*/John Llewellyn Rhys Prize, the 2000 Whitbread First Novel Award, 2001 Authors' Club First Novel Award and the 2001 Orange Prize for Fiction.

¹⁰⁵ McCrum, 'A Thriller in 10 Chapters'.

Busby warns, is that what gets published is not representative of what is being written by other black British or multicultural writers.¹⁰⁶

In this particular case, the search was on for a multicultural mix of novelists who might emulate Smith's success. Indeed, the effect of *White Teeth* cannot be underestimated. In 2004, Levy herself talked about a before and after moment: when *White Teeth* 'showed publishers that a black person could sell a lot of books'.¹⁰⁷ Her remarks further reinforce the commercial nature of modern publishing, and call attention to the precedent set by a small group of best-selling black British authors at the turn of the century.

Interestingly, when it was first published in 2000, *White Teeth* itself was positioned by its publisher and by reviewers alongside other novels with a multicultural theme. In particular, literary allegiances between Salman Rushdie and Hanif Kureishi were inferred when a particularly flattering endorsement from Rushdie was used by Penguin on the cover of hardback copy of the novel, and corroborated in a review by Robert McCrum which linked it with Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia*. As was explained at the outset of this thesis, *White Teeth*'s multicultural credentials were not due to its subject matter alone, but to the biography of its author as well.¹⁰⁸ Squires sees the emphasis placed upon Smith's ethnicity, her attractive appearance and her youth, as well as the theme of her novel, as being an example of marketing by ethnicity on the part of her publisher. Clearly, it was a combination of these factors that led to her work being seen as an example of modern, multicultural Britain.¹⁰⁹ Other novels, like *Small Island* and Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003), were subsequently published and were seen as comparable examples.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ Philippa Ireland, 'Conversation with Margaret Busby', recorded 25 May 2006. See Appendix 1, below, pp. 225-231.

¹⁰⁷ Lisa Mullen, 'Race under pressure', *Time Out*, 24 February 2004, p. 57.

¹⁰⁸ Robert McCrum, 'If 1900 was Oysters and Champagne, 2000 is a Pint of Lager and a Packet Of Crisps', *Observer*, 24 December 2000, p.19 (Review Section), cited in Squires, *Marketing Literature*, p 179.

¹⁰⁹ Squires, *Marketing Literature*, p. 180.

¹¹⁰ Monica Ali, *Brick Lane* (London: Doubleday, 2003).

Each of these novels proved to be successful in terms of both critical and commercial success and garnered considerable literary prestige in the early 2000s. As such, they are good examples of the interplay between literary prize culture and the marketplace. At the same time, they made a timely contribution towards debates around multiculturalism and modern British society. Their relevance to contemporary issues, including immigration and multiculturalism, was frequently remarked upon in the press. For example, at the time of the award of the Orange Prize and the Whitbread Novel Award to Levy for *Small Island* in 2004, John Sutherland writing in *The Guardian* observed somewhat sceptically,

I don't know if *Small Island* is the best book of 2004 and I'd be sceptical of anyone [...] telling me so. But the juries are to be congratulated I think, on doing the one thing that such panels can always do: namely, identifying the right book for the historical moment. The Whitbread award coincided, almost to the day, with [the leader of the opposition] Michael Howard's launching immigration as his party's big issue. If you want a grown-up meditation on that subject, don't listen to him: read Levy.¹¹¹

Dalya Alberge wrote in a similar vein to Sutherland: 'Amid the current debate about immigration, her book [*Small Island*] is particularly topical'.¹¹² Andrea Levy's success may well be attributed in part to an astute publishing decision and the timing of Review's publication of her fourth novel. At the same time, comments like this also serve as a reminder that whilst the effect of literary prizes can be considerable, a host of other factors might also influence the final decision on the part of the publisher to publish a particular book or to offer their support to an individual author or group of aspiring writers.

The previous four chapters have examined the intricacies of black British fiction publication from the 1980s to the present day, paying attention to the people who have

¹¹¹ John Sutherland, 'Nowadays, the novel is the only place where you're likely to find any grown-up discussion of race', *The Guardian*, 31 January 2005 G2, p. 7.

¹¹² Dalya Alberge, 'Small Island writer adds Whitbread Prize to honours', *The Times*, 26 January 2005, p. 2.

been involved in its development as well as the major factors that have had a direct impact upon the publication of specific texts and authors. The manner in which the publication of black British fiction developed cannot be attributed to any single factor, but to a combination of different forces and events. One of these was the development of the literary prize phenomenon. By adopting a comparative approach to the study of two distinct prizes, and thereafter putting forward an in depth analysis of the effect of both upon the reception, distribution, survival, and production of black British fiction, this final chapter has provided further insight into the circumstances surrounding its production and consumption in the period.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has explored the material factors affecting the publishing history of black British fiction. It has concentrated on those outside influences that had a direct impact upon the development of black British fiction in the second half of the twentieth century, appropriating Book History models for the transmission of texts and analysing the inter-relationship between publishers, culture and society. The analyses in Chapters Six through to Chapter Nine have demonstrated how various publishers of black British texts, writers, and other agents on the 'communications circuit' and within the scope of the broader literary field, have reacted to specific pressures from *outside* of publishing itself, whilst at the same time operating within the context of changes taking place *within* the industry and the literary world. In so doing, an argument has been put forward for the use of a holistic approach to the study of black British book history.

This study has revealed a noticeable pattern in the history of black British fiction publication. Over the course of the second half of the twentieth century the publication of black writers in Britain moved from being the pursuit of mainstream publishers in the 1950s and 1960s, to a more specialist activity from the late 1960s to the early 1990s. In the final decade of the century the publication of black British fiction emerged as a mainstream activity once again, with the gap narrowing between educational, specialist and mainstream publishers. There remains space, however, within the industry for specialist publishers of black British fiction that encompass a broad range of popular and literary genres, from crime writing to erotica. Until mainstream publishers engage fully with *all* writers, and readers, this space will still exist.

Finally, it has been shown how the use of the label 'black British' has frequently been contentious. Despite this, it has been, and continues to be, employed expediently by academics, and by writers, publishers and critics. Nowadays, many writers who were initially categorised as 'black British' prefer to be read and seen simply as contemporary writers. There are several reasons as previously indicated for this. At *Black British and Proud* in 2006, the author Diana Evans admitted that she felt frustrated about being called

a black writer, feeling that she was therefore expected to write about certain issues and not others. Crime writer, Mike Gayle has described himself as a black writer writing for a mainstream audience. Courttia Newland, who also considers himself to be a black writer, again inserts the caveat that at the same time he wants to maintain the freedom to write about whatever he likes with an appeal to a wide and diverse audience. Valerie Mason-John, who has been variously labelled over time as a black writer and a lesbian writer, has told how she also chooses to rejected many of the labels foisted upon her.¹ The sentiments of such successful contemporary authors reveals a desire on the part of British-born black writers to be able to write on a variety of themes, for a wide readership: in other words, to break out of a literary straitjacket into which they have forced by those who continue to entertain limited ideas about what black writers should be writing about.

The story of why and how black writers in Britain have been published does not, therefore, end here. It is clear that the period from the early 1980s to the 2000s was a highly significant one for the emergence of black British writers and writing specifically. Perhaps in the twenty-first century this particular era is coming to an end. The kinds of explorations of black *and* British experience through fiction that have been considered here were authored by second- and third-generation black Britons. These black writers hail from elsewhere but at the same time are rooted in Britain and can most comfortably lay claim to the label 'black British'. Future generations, however, will be even more grounded in Britain and will write and have published a different kind of fiction once again. When this happens, the label 'black British' is likely to be abandoned in favour of another, no doubt equally controversial, taxonomy.

¹ All of these comments were made by the named authors during the introduction to a panel event entitled *Black British and Proud* at the Karamel Club in London in 2006.

Appendices

Appendix One

Transcript of an interview with Dr Margaret Busby CBE, recorded 25 May 2006 at the British Library in London.

Margaret Busby was born in Ghana of African-Caribbean parents. She co-founded the publishing firm of Allison & Busby with Clive Allison in the late nineteen sixties, and was editorial director there for more than twenty years. She has been an editor, publisher, writer, literary critic, broadcaster and mentor for aspiring publishers. She has been on the panel of judges for a number of literary awards, including the SAGA Prize and the Orange Prize. She has worked on several cultural committees and has been a member of steering groups involved in campaigning for greater representation in publishing.

Philippa Ireland You set up Allison & Busby with Clive Allison in 1967, shortly after leaving university. May we begin by talking in more detail about your motivation for establishing a publishing house at this time?

Margaret Busby I met Clive Allison when we were both still at university and we decided to start a publishing organisation. [...] I was doing things with my college literary magazine and I was introduced to somebody [at a party] who was at Oxford doing things with his college literary magazine. That was Clive Allison. The conversation went something along the lines: 'What are you thinking of doing when you leave university?', 'Oh, I thought I might go into publishing'. 'Oh, I thought I might go into publishing'; 'Why don't we set up a publishing company?' Then we met up after we graduated and we did it!

We were going to do things that other people weren't doing. The first three titles we published were in '67 (there was a year or two before that when we were actively thinking about and working with [these titles] so that would explain any discrepancies in the dates attributed to when Allison and Busby was first set up). At that time Allison & Busby was evenings and weekends. We both had full time jobs with other publishers. I was working with Cresset Press, a small company. I was Editorial Assistant but I also did the ads, I did rights, all sorts of things.... Clive was with Pan or Macmillan. Cresset Press was at 11 Fitzroy Square and in the same building there was a small publisher whom Clive and I sublet an office from in the evenings. We were charged 10 quid a week. We didn't have any money and we didn't have any distribution. We did things we believed in. So when we published those first three books, which were all poetry, we published 5,000 copies in cheap paperback editions when most other people were doing expensive skin hardbacks. Five thousand is a lot of copies for poetry, but we didn't know this. We thought, of all the millions of people in the country, there must be 5,000 people that want this book! They were five bob each. We sold them ourselves in the street. We would knock on college doors saying 'do you want to buy a book?' That's how we started. When we found the first novel we wanted to go full time with, we left our jobs. It was '69.

Then, a man called Alexis Lykiard who was at Cambridge University with my husband met a black American writer called Sam Greenlee whilst on holiday in Greece. He had been trying to get his novel published without much success and Alexis said he knew of someone who had started a publishing company. So Sam was put in touch with me. I met Sam; I borrowed £50 so he could stay in London and I could work on the manuscript with him. Clive and I left our jobs and that was our first full time book – our first novel: *The Spook Who Sat by the Door*. It was a good book: a sort of political thriller. We thought it might be worth trying to get it serialised. So we sent it to *The Observer*. They sent the manuscript back saying that they didn't really serialise fiction and if they did it probably wouldn't be a Black Power thriller like this, as they put it. We sent it back saying, 'you've got it wrong'. And then they did it: they accepted it. We sold the translation rights to lots of languages: Italian, Japanese, Dutch, French... We sold the American rights back to the Americans – to Bantam Books – for a lot of money. Although we knew nothing about royalties so when they offered us 4% we thought that was probably alright. That was the first novel we published and it did well enough. That was a black book. Our next novel

was by a science fiction writer. So it wasn't a black company in that sense, although I was black and some of the authors we took on were black. We were publishing good books. It wasn't patronising black writers by putting them into some special category. We were publishing writers we considered to be good. Some were black, some were white, some were Hungarian, Caribbean, whatever...

PI You said in 2004 that in terms of racial diversity publishing had not changed much since you entered the business. Can you describe in general terms what the industry was like when you started. How did the fact that you were a black woman working in a predominately white industry make a difference at the time, and does it still now?

MB There weren't any black publishers. There was John La Rose at New Beacon Books working in his own company, but I don't know of any other black people working in the mainstream industry, let alone in decision making positions. I remember after I left university, although Clive and I had started A&B, I was applying for jobs and getting interviews; I remember turning up for one interview and someone saying 'there's a black girl here and she says she has an interview'...my name doesn't sound particularly black...

You've used the term black British in your correspondence with me, in fact if you think about the '60s, there were not many black writers who were born here and being published here. You had writers from Africa or the Caribbean who lived here and settled here, but you wouldn't call them black British. There wasn't such a thing.

OK, we published Buchi Emecheta. She was Nigerian. We published George Lamming. He was from Barbados. So there were people who were black. We published writers who were based here and people who weren't based here. We published black American writers. We published a variety of black writers. But you wouldn't call any of them black British in that way.

PI Do you think that there was a particular point in time when 'black British' began to allude to a certain group of writers and writing?

MB I think it's a question of time. It isn't right to date the black presence to the Windrush. But it is probably the Windrush generation's children. Andrea Levy for instance – she wasn't writing then because she wasn't old enough! If you work back from that generation, and how old these children would have to be to start writing that's probably when you start dating a generation who were born here and write here and could therefore be considered black British as opposed to those who were born elsewhere and came here.

PI To return to your early publishing activities, am I correct in thinking that Allison & Busby was a commercial, by which I mean money-making, enterprise?

MB To the extent that every publisher is commercial in that you'd go out of business if you didn't have enough money, yes. But making money was not the point of it. We were publishing books because we believed in them. We had to find a way to make them survive: to make them commercial. We had to make judgements. But we didn't sit down and say 'what's the most commercial sort of book we can publish to make money?'

PI Things had clearly moved on from 'knocking on doors' so to speak, though. I am interested in learning more about the publishing process at Allison & Busby, specifically the marketing and distribution of books. You have described how you promoted and sold books through unorthodox channels, but how important were things like reviews to the success of a publication?

MB When we started full time we were distributed for a while by Andre Deutsch. And we had different sales forces. There was a normal warehouse/ reps structure. Aside from that...there's no point having a warehouse full of books. People have got to know that a book is in a bookshop to be able to go out and buy it. If people don't know a book exists, then they are not going to buy it. We had to generate publicity and reviews. We got quite a fair amount of review coverage. In fact I have examples of some of the publicity I got as a 'freaky black publisher', as 'a girl from Ghana [who] goes into publishing'.

At that point people weren't starting small publishing companies in the way that became more common. Allison & Busby was around before Virago and The Women's Press for instance. It wasn't a common thing to happen, and it wasn't common for one of the directors for be a black woman.

We got a fair amount of publicity. One of the best compliments someone ever paid me a few years ago was to say that the great thing about Allison & Busby was that you never knew what they were going to do next but you knew it was going to be interesting. That was the reputation we had. We weren't predictable. We were doing things other people probably might not have done, or in ways that they might not have done them. Given our size and our lack of experience, I think we did pretty well. In fact, in 1976 Allison & Busby published its 100th title. And we won the Guardian Fiction Prize two years running with Roy Heath, who was a Guyanese novelist, and with Michael Moorcock.

So we got reviews; we won prizes; we sold rights; we actually did pretty well in terms of publishing.

PI Can you perhaps give any further examples of the unpredictable nature of your publishing activities at Allison & Busby?

MB I am too close to it really. But, for example, we did a book called *A Book of Five Rings* by Miyamoto Musashi, a seventeenth century Japanese Samurai. It is still being reprinted. We sold rights to Penguin. It's still in print with Penguin and Allison & Busby. It wasn't an obvious book.

We published *Absolute Beginners* by Colin MacInnes. We reprinted that. In fact, that was a book where you can tell that a review had a particular impact because most of the reviews had come out, and then there was a gap. Then there was a later review in the NME (New Musical Express) and after *that* review we sold film rights and things started happening. *That* was the review that made the difference. We published Claire Rayner's first novel. It was a fairly eclectic but interesting list. We published CLR James at the point when he was not in print.

I've known CLR all my life because he was at school with my Dad. At that point he was mainly out of print. His one book in print was *Minty Alley* which John La Rose had, and his cricket memoirs were with another publisher. In 1980 we reprinted *Black Jacobins*, his seminal book. Three collections of selected writings followed. At that time CLR wasn't very well known so we had to work hard to get him reviewed. By the time we'd been publishing him for a while he was getting featured in the *Sunday Times*, photographed by Lord Snowdon. He's actually far better known now than he would have been. There are libraries named after him and so on... We published him because I knew he existed, I had a connection with him, and he was important.

PI How influential were other, external factors on your publishing? I am thinking here of the Radical Book Fairs and your links with other publishers, colleagues and friends perhaps. When you spoke recently at the launch of the Bogle L'Ouverture archives it was clear that you and Jessica Huntley have shared some significant professional experiences – the Book Fairs being one of those – would you mind speaking in more detail about your relationships with other publishers?

MB We participated in the Radical Book Fairs of Black and Third World Books. We tried to maximise every book's potential. You want to get as wide a general audience as possible but if there is a specific angle, then you want readers to know about it.

Jessica Huntley is a friend. In fact we had this double act going on because we seemed to be the only two black women publishers around. I've done indexes for Jessica, I've reviewed for Jessica, I've edited for Jessica. If Jessica wants to know something I'll tell her if I know it.

Similarly, I've always encouraged other black people to go into publishing. I think there is a need for black people to be represented in publishing in all different forms. You can have your autonomous black publishers, whether these are small publishers like New Beacon Books and Bogle L'Ouverture, but you also need participation in the whole industry.

And even if you are an autonomous black publisher, you've got to reckon with the national media in some way. You *can* do without it. Jessica Huntley has said that when she published *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* she didn't get a single national review but she still sold 40,000 copies. So it can go both ways.

In the 1980s I was involved in founding a group called GAP – which stood for Greater Access to Publishing – as was Jessica. We were campaigning for more diversification of the publishing workforce. We had a seminar for black women wanting to go into publishing. We had a seminar for careers officers trying to suggest publishing as an option for some of their students. Eventually that fizzled out because there weren't enough of us. Then the Arts Council took up the idea and started their training bursaries which ran for a while.

PI Was this a direct result the GAP initiative?

MB I think it probably was. I was also a sort of mentor for students on that Arts Council scheme. In the first year there was a woman called Nana Yaa Mensah (who works for the *New Statesman*). She came out of that Arts Council scheme; as did Alison Morrison who is now at Walker Books. The idea was that two candidates a year would spend time with both a small and a large publishing company and at the end of that year they might feed into the industry. The Arts Council now has another, similar scheme going. Nothing much has changed. You can still count on your fingers the number of black people in publishing.

PI So you don't think that as far as representation within the industry is considered, publishing has come on very far since the days when you set up GAP?

MB Well how many black people do you know in publishing? You know there are the small black publishing companies – New Beacon Books, Bogle L'Ouverture, Black Amber (Black Amber is now part of Arcadia). I encouraged Rosemarie Hudson who founded Black Amber to start up the company. I also had a conversation with Dotun Adebayo when he started The X Press about what to do. There are a *handful* of black publishers who are trying to be autonomous. But within the industry....I'm sure there are a lot of receptionists, post people, secretaries...but in senior positions in the mainstream companies, you might find black people in design or in marketing, but there aren't many.

If I am a black writer, I haven't got much choice about black editors. A good editor can work with any writer, and has to. But there are situations where an editor's ignorance of the cultural context can be a hindrance. The function of an editor is not to impose his/her view of what a writer must say. It is to help the writer to say what they want to say in the best possible way.

Representation is also important in terms of what is taken on. What tends to happen is that you have a success and everyone is looking for 'the next Zadie Smith' or 'the next Monica Ali' or whoever it is. And so it's not necessarily what's being written out there, it's

just somebody has decided that's a trend so other things don't get a look in. You don't find many black writers, for example, writing in genres (Octavia Butler in the States is a good example of a science fiction writer). You tend to find that those people who get taken on by editors who are not black themselves do so because, I think in some way, that editor decided has decided what black writing is or what they want it to be. So they only take on certain kinds of books. They want multicultural London for instance because Zadie Smith worked. *That* worked so that's what they are looking for. They'll then overlook something else. If it's just a love story by a black writer perhaps they wouldn't be interested because that is not particularly black. They are looking for *black* in those terms. Which I think is short-sighted. The thing is a black writer should be as free to write what he or she wants to write as much as any other writer. Obviously whatever they write is going to be informed by their own perspective, I'm not saying they won't have any black content, but that's for them to decide. It's not for an editor to say, 'I'm going to filter out anything that doesn't fit my view of what it is to be authentically black'.

Also, in terms of what they do with the books themselves when they've got them. In the past I've had white publisher friends of mine who are publishing a book by a black writer say to me, 'will you just check the review list', because they *don't know* the specialist black outlets. They *would* know if they had black people working there. I've also had people say 'can you check this headline, it's not racist is it?' It highlights that there are no black people in the publishing office. If you are in a publishing office and there are no black people there, and you're not black, you have to think, who do I know that's black that I check something with? It's not normal. If a normal slice of society was represented in the publishing office then you'd be able to ask a colleague or whoever else was there. Those are the reasons that the publishing industry *should* reflect normal society. It's *abnormal* otherwise. It's like saying all publishers have to be aged 25 – that's not normal, or 5ft 6" – that's not the way society is.

Everybody wants to be a writer, but nobody wants to be a publisher. You can be both. Toni Morrison was both. I think that starting writers have a lot of illusions about writing. They think writing is a way to become rich and famous. That's what they aspire to, and then they get despondent if they are turned down. People say that they were turned down because of prejudice. Actually it might be because they are not very good. You can't use that argument if you've been turned down by a black editor. If I turn somebody down, it's not because I'm prejudiced, it's because I think the manuscript is not very good.

So I think that there is a perpetual need to encourage people to be involved in publishing, whether it's within companies that are all black or within the wider publishing industry. The *presence* of black people within the industry is what is important.

PI I would like to move on if I may to talk about your publishing of a particular black writer, Buchi Emecheta, at Allison & Busby. Before going outside of normal publishing circles to distribute some of her later work, she published eight books with Allison & Busby. Can you describe your publishing relationship with Buchi, or recall any specific details about the publication of her novels?

MB Her writing was first published as a column in the *New Statesman* (in fact, the first thing I published out of university was in the *New Statesman*). The book that came out her column was actually published by a company I was working for before I started Allison & Busby, Barrie and Jenkins. That was *In the Ditch* in 1972. *Second Class Citizen* was the book I starting publishing Buchi with, in 1975.

Somebody gave Buchi an outlet in the *New Statesman* because they saw that she had a different point of view. It's a bit like the 'freaky black publisher' comments about me. She was a black council-estate wife who had got these social problems with her kids. She wasn't rich and famous. She was living in a council flat when I met her. She was being published because of that. I was keen to publish her because I thought it was important to see her point of view represented. I was very hands on with my editing of Buchi. I even did the cover drawing for one of the editions of *Second Class Citizen*.

Normal procedure in those days was to do the hardback first, both for the libraries and to get the reviews because most literary editors didn't review original paperbacks. You would sell on the paperback rights. Roy Heath we sold to Flamingo, for example; in Buchi's case we sold the paperback rights to Heinemann for the African Writers Series. There did come a point when we did our own simultaneous hardbacks and paperbacks.

PI You made a comment that to Brian Alleyne which he has quoted in his book *Radicals Against Race* about the fact that the needs of black readers were not catered for by mainstream bookstores and publishers. Can you elaborate upon this comment, and whether you think this has changed at all since in recent years?

MB Allison & Busby always had a stand at the Black Book Fair. What was striking about the Book Fairs was that it was ordinary members of the public buying books. You knew very well that all those people wouldn't have been going into WHSmith or the equivalent to buy books. They didn't feel able to. The Book Fairs provided an environment that was specifically welcoming to them.

Even from the point of view of our sales people trying to sell our books to mainstream bookshops, foreign names equate with difficult books. It was harder to get a book into a bookshop if the name was unknown and called Emecheta, than if it was Jones. The perception is that one is easier than the other.

PI How were these difficulties overcome?

MB You just had to get the reviews and raise the status of the writer so that the bookshops couldn't ignore them. It's still going on now. Ekow Eshun, for instance, published a book and I reviewed it last year, but it's still not stocked by Waterstones. Their reason being that there is not enough readership for it.

There's a misconception that the only audience for black books is black: that only black people buy black books, which is clearly not the case. Black writers are read by black people and white people. It's an argument that's used by booksellers, by agents, and by publishers. Agents say they already have a black writer; publishers say a book won't sell many copies as it will only sell to a few black readers. That is not how it works.

And in terms of reviewing, I don't get asked to review anything unless it's a black book even though I reviewed for everyone over the years.

PI Do you think that literary phenomena, like the publication of Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* perhaps, have been detrimental to those black writers who aren't seen by publishers as going to be as big commercial successes as novelists like that, who aren't going to be 'the next Zadie Smith'?

MB It's always going to be like that. There are always stars. I published an anthology called *Daughters of Africa* in the 1990s. One of the reasons I did that was because of what was happening then: you got the impression in those days that there were only three black women writers. There was Maya Angelou, Alice Walker, and Toni Morrison and any time that any black women wrote a book they were compared to these three writers.

It's not a new thing with Zadie Smith. You wouldn't compare Barbara Cartland with A.S. Byatt just because they are white but that it what was happening then and still is happening. That's the problem. You get some writers – a handful of black writers – elevated every so often who then become the standard by which everyone else is judged. Why?

PI Is there anything else you feel that you can add to your recollections so far of how black book publishing in Britain has developed since the 1960s?

MB There has been a change. In the 1960s and earlier most of the black fiction that was published was published by the educational presses such as Heinemann and Longman. Occasionally you'd get somebody like Deutsch doing black writers in the trade, but mostly they were published by educational publishers.

I suppose what has happened is that there has been a gradual shifting away from ghettoising black writers in these educational lists into them just being published. There probably isn't a mainstream publisher now who *hasn't* got some black writers, even if they haven't got any black people working there. There will be a pet black writer, or two, or more.

There are some publishers that are particularly good because they've got editors who are particularly attuned to that. People like Simon Prosser at Hamish Hamilton is somebody who comes to mind. I was a judge on a short story competition – the Penguin *decibel* Prize – that was an initiative of Simon's because he is concerned with the diversification of the canon.

PI You've just mentioned prizes, how significant do you feel these are these nowadays?

MB I've judged prizes; I've had books that have won prizes.

In some ways it's arbitrary. Last year I was a judge on the Orange New Writers award which is open to writers of first novels or short stories. Of course these writers would also be eligible for the main Orange Prize. There was very little overlap between the two prizes because that's two sets of judges with two very different sets of tastes. Some things we dismissed, and some things we picked up on and they didn't. It's personal. It's arbitrary.

I think it's a great thing to encourage writers. I am all for prizes. As long as people don't think that anything that doesn't win a prize is therefore to be dismissed.

In the same way, I was a bit concerned that there was a list of the 100 best books from Africa in the twentieth century or something, and there was a lot of focus on those 100 books which suggests that these are *only* 100 books anyone has to think about which is not true. That becomes a canon and everything else gets sidelined. That's the danger with prizes.

In terms of encouraging people, prizes are important and prizes can focus on a writer in ways that, whatever else they do next, their sales will benefit.

Another thing about prizes, some bookshops have black sections don't they? Now, I'm very ambivalent about that. I don't mind if you are going to have a section for women's books, for black books, whatever, so long as they are also on the main shelves. What happens is that you are sidelined in the black book section until you win the Booker Prize or the Nobel Prize. That's when you graduate to the big books. That's the effect of winning prizes in practical terms. There are pros and cons.

Appendix Two

Transcript of an interview with Sarah White, recorded 10 August 2006 at New Beacon Books, 76 Stroud Green Road, London.

Sarah White is managing director of New Beacon Books, which she set up with John La Rose in 1966. She is also a trustee of the George Padmore Institute, and was a member of the organising committee for the International Book Fairs of Radical Black and Third World Books.

Philippa Ireland At present, 'black British' is a term that I am utilising very much as a working label, and one which I aim to interrogate throughout the course of my research, with particular reference to examining the extent to which all types of publishers have engaged with this term. To begin with, I would appreciate your thoughts on the suitability of this term to describe a particular group of writers or type of writing, and its application over the course of the twentieth century.

Sarah White I think it basically happened later on. We started as Caribbean specialists, not as black British, and as far as the mainstream was concerned it wasn't really seen as a genre at that time – in the 1960s. Obviously there had been a number of Caribbean and African novelists published in the '50s. How the publishers then viewed them, I don't know – I was a teenager at the time! Obviously, they were being published by the mainstream publishers as good writers and I don't think it was seen like it was good to have a black figure [on their publishing list] at all. It seemed to be very much part of ordinary mainstream publishing in the '50s.

Then in the '60s, possibly because – and I have no proof of this – the number of immigrants grew and in a way you could say the problems grew, the amount of publishing in the mainstream fell away. That was one of the issues of the Caribbean Artists Movement (CAM). Though at the same time people were being published by the mainstream. Michael Anthony was Andre Deutsch, and Naipaul was Deutsch...so it was actually still going on, the mainstream publishing. When you think about the people who took part in CAM – or the novelists publishing at that time – they *were* being published in actual fact. So it probably actually fell off more in the '70s, rather than the '60s.

Sam Selvon published the *Lonely Londoners* which *reflected* the black British experience. But I don't think that at that time black British was really seen as a concept at all.

You had the Black Power Movement in the '60s, and you also had the beginnings of the concept 'come what may, we're here to stay'. A lot of the students passing through in the '60s were going back to the Caribbean, but in the late '60s/early '70s there was a much more rooted population. This is where they were going to be; this is where they were going to live; and this is what society was going to have to deal with. So the black British thing *gradually* emerged from *that*. But I don't think as a concept it really arrived until the late '70s/early '80s. But what you did have – as you have with most literatures – was the poetry first and then the novels. There are so many novels coming out now, but in the '70s it was poetry. I can't remember when Joan Riley's novel came out – that was one of the early ones – you could say from the black British genre. Then there was one title which The Women's Press brought out, edited by Rhonda Cobham and Merle Collins – *Watchers and Seekers*. That was an early collection of black women writing prose, although there may be some poetry in it too.

On the educational front, when we first started, the only books we could get for children with black images in came from British publishers publishing in the Caribbean, like Longman. The breakthrough was Errol Lloyd and Petronella Breinburg's *My Brother Sean* which came out in 1973, published by Bodley Head. That was the first book that had a black child as the main figure, and beginning to reflect the black population settled here. There were three in that series. Then gradually, gradually... now there are masses of children's books. Some of them are tokenistic obviously, but otherwise lots of really good ones.

The conscious effort of publishers, and of awareness, came in the '80s after the riots. At the time of the International Book Fair of Radical and Third World Books (1982-1995) as well...

PI Was this development driven by the independent publishers, like New Beacon Books?

SW The Book Fair was led by ourselves, Bogle [L'Ouverture] and Race Today. They were the first people publishing. Then there were the other independent, but bigger, publishers like Virago and The Women's Press. Virago had Maya Angleou and The Women's Press had Alice Walker. They became very popular. The African American writers were very popular, and then they began to publish some black British authors as well.

Right now it's difficult to know how far publishers publish just to tick a box. Obviously mainstream publishers are publishing quite a lot of black British – or whatever you like to call it – material, but how far they do it to tick a box or because it's good...

PI You have been quoted as saying that your main business is in supplying schools, university and college students, as well as libraries, with books, and that you categorise your stock according to changes in the tastes and markets of your readership. Please could you elaborate upon the markets for which you publish and sell books, and how this might have evolved over the past forty years?

SW In the '80s, after the riots, after the New Cross Massacre, the government put a lot of money into – in those days it was called African Caribbean, not black British – African and Caribbean collections in libraries. You'd have African Caribbean librarians who were appointed and they had fairly big budgets for books in their field. So for us small bookshops it was a bonanza.

The libraries in those days had allocated budgets for building up African Caribbean collections. It was part of building up a black middle class – trying to reduce the problem of riots. It's a standard thing. Anyone who came from a colony knew exactly what was going on because exactly the same thing had happened in the colonies: you build up the middle class to reduce the amount of opposition. It was a standard governing technique.

As far as we were concerned it was quite helpful, budget-wise. The librarians had to come and buy their books from somewhere. We obviously had a pretty good collection. There were 5 or 6 black bookshops in London at the time.

PI Which were these bookshops?

SW There was the Walter Rodney. There was Grassroots in Ladbroke Grove. There was Sabaar in Brixton, which is now Bookscan. There was Soma, which was mainly Indian, in Kennington. There was Headstart Books and Crafts in Tottenham. The play, Fix-Up, was about a black British bookshop, clearly based on the one in Tottenham.

Since then, there's ourselves left and Headstart is still there. The Walter Rodney's gone; Grassroots has gone – these all went in the '90s; and Sabaar's moved. There have been some others that have come and gone. There's a place down in Newham, and I think there are some online bookshops as well.

PI How did you distribute the books that New Beacon published? Was it primarily through your own bookshop and at the Book Fairs?

SW When we first started they just seemed to sell. We were going around doing bookstalls when we first started. We didn't have a bookshop.

PI Perhaps we could backtrack a bit slightly and talk about how the publishing and bookshop started.

SW The publishing started in '66, and that was really John's vision. He'd always wanted to go into publishing so that people weren't reliant on the metropolitan publishers to decide what should be available for people to read and to keep the continuity going. Things would go out of print, and then [as a result] the next generation wouldn't know what the history was.

The first book we did was John's book of poems. That was a personal thing. The next book was on Marcus Garvey. [This was] just a short book which was based on a talk that Adolph Edwards gave. Adolph was a student here. There was a study group around CLR James in London at the time which Adolph was a part of. In those days, very little was known about Marcus Garvey. There was about one book available. So John thought it would be worthwhile to republish Adolph's talk in a small booklet to introduce people to the ideas of Marcus Garvey. So we did that and it sold very well.

We used to sell by just going round to meetings – CAM meetings or Black Power meetings. We had a bag of books when we started. At that time we were living in a bedsit. In '69 we moved to our house which is up the road. We then had the bookshop on the ground floor. Then in '73 we came down here [to Stroud Green Road]. So for the first three years we were selling books out of a bag, just going around to meetings. That's how they sold. Plus, we'd get orders from other bookshops which were obviously for libraries or other customers. So we'd sell them quite steadily. People used to seem to find out about us.

The next two books, which were again part of John's vision (and also CAM's vision), were books of criticism. There was Wilson Harris's *Tradition, the Writer and Society* and *Caribbean Writers: Critical Essays* by Ivan Van Sertima. So again, it was Caribbean people themselves looking at the literature and doing their own criticism of it. Then the next one was again doing one's own criticism of things of interest to Caribbean people. It was very much Caribbean history, politics and literature at that point. They were things that were trying to resurrect or give people information about, or connections with, Africa – connections with their history. Not relying on the mainstream.

Another important part of the publishing was reprinting things. I remember John *wanted* to reprint, but we never got around to it – because it was just too massive and we couldn't manage it – a history of the Taino culture in the Caribbean which he thought was really important. We considered it but it was just very big and money was tight. So that one slipped by. There were lots of things that we wanted to publish that we didn't publish for various reasons. Publishing takes time and effort.

We did two books by JJ Thomas which were reprints from the nineteenth century. That was really important. One was his grammar of the Creole language in Trinidad, which was the first *recognition* of where the Creole language had come from: the recognition of it as a language. Generally, the approach had been that you should speak Standard English and any other was bad English. Obviously, other people – people like Louise Bennett – were doing things in the '50s and '60s and it was one of the themes of the Caribbean Artists Movement: the question of language and people's language and Nation Language. Here was JJ Thomas doing it in 1869. That was really something. The other one, *Froudacity*, is a very nice repost to Froude's rather negative, critical thing about blacks in the Caribbean. That was interesting.

Then of course John was interested in two other things. The Beacon Period, which is where New Beacon got its name. So we reprinted three novels from the Beacon Period: *Minty Alley* by CLR James and two others by Alfred Mendes. That was again looking at making those books available again. The other side of the reprinting was the *Labour in the West Indies*, again a very important pamphlet, by Arthur Lewis. You could have commissioned something or written something more original, but Arthur Lewis's pamphlet had all the details.

For a small publisher like New Beacon, a way of getting information out is to use something that's there, rather than waiting for somebody to write something new which might take forever. So we reprinted Arthur Lewis's pamphlet and then Susan Craig wrote an afterword which brought it up to date.

That was one thing we always did with our reprinting. We always had an Introduction to put the things into context. We would commission somebody to do that. I think that CLR did the Introduction to *Froudacity* and a linguist specialist did the Introduction to *Creole Grammar*.

We'd always try to place things in context. I remember Frank Cass at the time was making a mint of money out of reprints. They reprinted all these old historical things which had been printed by colonialists living in or visiting the Caribbean in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. At that time libraries had the money to buy these things in hardback and so Cass used to come out with these reprints and all they'd done was photograph the original and put a green hardback cover on it. No Introduction. No context. No nothing. It

was an easy way of making money. They did a lot of those things which were useful to have but you just felt they weren't really interested in the context of it, of what the history meant now.

PI James Procter in *Writing Black Britain* has written that John La Rose aimed to make long out of print West Indian material available to West Indians, and all those interested, as cheaply as possible. How did this influence the practicalities of publication at New Beacon Books? You have mentioned pamphlets and small publications, were these the norm? Did you mainly publish in hardback or paperback format?

SW It varied. Most small things we didn't produce in hardback as well. When we started doing novels we certainly did those in paperback and hardback. On the whole we did paperback and hardback for most of the '70s, '80s and '90s. To be quite honest we've gone right back to paperback because libraries don't necessarily want the hardback over the paperback now. The point of doing hardback in the old days was that it would keep the paperback price down. It actually doesn't cost that much more to do a hardback, to get a binding, but you can charge twice as much. So it means that you can play around a bit with the prices. But if the hardbacks aren't going to sell to the libraries then there's not much point doing them. Your subsidy element doesn't work. That's the reality of it. In the old days libraries would always go for the hardback, but nowadays it very rare for them to order hardback over a paperback.

PI Did you produce hardback editions for review purposes as well?

SW We never really got many reviews. In the end we rather gave up on sending many review copies out. It's a very close circle, reviews. We *do* have reviews of our books, but not necessarily in the mainstream papers. I've got a file for each book with reviews, so we did get reviews – in the academic press/Caribbean press/African press - not that much in the mainstream...

PI How did you publicise your books to libraries and to other customers?

SW You list every book that you publish in Books in Print, the information source that libraries obviously keep an eye on. We also sent out information or review copies. We'd always have leaflets and things. Because we have a bookshop we'd always have a list each month to send out of new books that had come into the shop and our own new books would be on that list as well. It was a mixture of things. You'd also have launches, and the Book Fairs of course where each year you'd have a window for people to see new books.

PI To return to the practicalities of book publication, can you elaborate any further upon this at New Beacon Books?

SW How we started is quite interesting, financially. John was working on a building site, he fell and cracked a vertebrae in his back. Being a good trade unionist he sued the company. Luckily it wasn't a serious accident. He got a few hundred pounds for that. That was his contribution to the publishing starting. We used that as seed money. Then I put a similar amount in. The first book we did – the book of poetry – my father used to work in the Arts Council and he was Literature Director at that point, he knew masses of little presses because the Arts Council used to give grants to them. You'd go to the house and on the table would be these little books of poetry, nicely produced. We were leafing through these because John was looking for a printer for the publishing...he wanted it cheap but he also wanted it well done. We spotted this one that was done by a company called Villiers Publications, which was round the corner from us in Tufnell Park. So we went there. It was run by a guy called John Sankey who's interested in literature. In those days it was a hot metal press, and John had printed the *City Lights* magazine. He was very much into beat poetry, poetry and that sort of thing, so we gave him ours to do.

We paid for that up front. From then onwards we always said that John Sankey was better to us than any bank. Banks always want collateral, whereas John – for the majority of our books – would print the books, bill you, and give you credit for 60 days and if you

hadn't paid in full in 60 days he would charge you some interest on it. In other words he was actually acting as a bank.

Bogle used John Sankey as well. We introduced them to Villiers. You could say he helped a lot of small publishers get going. If we had had to raise the money for every book each time we did it...it takes time for books to sell and to get the money back...so he was an excellent person.

In one of our catalogues we have a little tribute to him, saying thanks because he really did help us with the publishing. We were disciplined as well. We'd pay him regularly so he could see the balance going down. But at the height of our publishing when we were doing 6/7 books a year (they'd cost roughly £2,000 each) we could be getting a bill for about £14,000 mounting up so we'd pay it off at about £1,000 a month which would keep it under control. He was very, very helpful and he was a good quality printer.

When computers came in, when hot metal really died a death, and I think the lease came up on his printery, he decided to operate as a production manager. So we'd still give him our books to do and he'd still invoice us, but he'd be putting it out to other people. He remained our printer. We were very lucky.

PI As you have said, the New Beacon's publishing was really part of John's vision, and you have talked already about the reprinting of some specific books by New Beacon. Can you now tell me a bit more about the selection of books for publication by New Beacon, was this solely down to John?

SW Oh, yes. I was much more on the practical side – proof reading...

We'd get a lot of manuscripts in but on the whole there weren't many things that came totally cold. There were so many people one knew anyway that an awful lot of stuff came as recommendations. For example, Erna Brodber, who has been one of our major authors, I think it was her sister who knew John and who asked him to read her sister's novel. He did, and he really liked it and said we'd publish it. So a lot of it was word of mouth.

We did get lots of manuscripts in and we did try to read them but we couldn't deal with them all...Norman Smith, I remember, we met through the Book Fair...

It was a network. Brian's book [Brian Alleyne, *Radicals Against Race* (2002)] looks at the New Beacon network...James Berry we knew through the CAM. There would have been mutual friends...people would be coming through intermediaries, or would be wanting to talk with John anyway. There's a whole mass of manuscripts from people from other parts of the network.

PI Speaking of the network, is it appropriate to consider the activities of New Beacon Books and Bogle L'Ouverture simultaneously, as is often the case?

SW One shouldn't always. But the thing is, apart from the fact that we were publishing and bookselling in a very similar way, there was close contact politically and culturally as well. Jessica and Eric [Huntley] had been good friends of John's when they first came over. They had been close *political* comrades and they remained political comrades right through. They were involved in the education movement together; they were involved in the Black Parents' Movement together; the New Cross Massacre Committee; the Book Fair started with Bogle in there. Jessica resigned after about three years. They still came to the Book Fair and things like that, and we always remained in contact and things...So certainly through the '60s/'70s/'80s there was a lot of close activity *apart from* the publishing and the bookselling. Everyone was working together on different things, and we supported each other. New Beacon predates them by about a couple of years – I can't remember exactly – but John always supported them. He was always very much for supporting other groups, and not feeling territorial about anything. The more the better. Obviously there's a mass of stuff to publish and one publisher can't do it all.

PI That leads me to ask about New Beacon's influence on other publishers. Jeremy Poynting, for instance, has described you and John as his inspiration for Peepal Tree Press. Are you able to talk a bit more about this from your point of view?

SW Jeremy did his PhD on East Indian writing so he spent a lot of time with John. He collected so much stuff doing his PhD that he thought needed to be published, and that was how Peepal Tree started. So, yes he always acknowledged that.

Like New Beacon's publishing was underpinned by the bookshop, because that (especially in the '80s and '90s) produced more money and profit than the publishing. Peepal Tree has been underpinned by its printery. They do get grants as well, but they have a commercial printing press. Jeremy was very much into computer printing right from the very beginning, and was always setting his own books. I remember talking with him about it. Early on he did all the typesetting by himself for his books, and he now has a commercial printing business that does other jobs which help to pay for the books he publishes.

It is very difficult for publishing to survive just on its own, unless you're a really major publisher that's publishing blockbusters. That's why Walter Rodney had its bookshop as well as its publishing.

PI Did the attacks on bookshops for minority groups in the 1970s affect New Beacon at all?

SW We had some scrawl and things – graffiti and stuff, yes. We might have had a broken window.

PI That could potentially have had a significant commercial impact on the business.

SW I suppose it could, but we never really thought of it like that. We just thought we'd carry on anyway. We didn't set up the bookshop to underpin the publishing, it just happened that way. Our bookselling happened because of CAM, because of the Black Power Movement. Because of the demand for books. At CAM meetings people wanted to read and to get the books that were being discussed. At Black Power meetings, again all these classics were coming out of that period and being made available so one was beginning to get quite a wide collection of books. It wasn't that they were exclusive either. People going to CAM would be interested in the political books as well as the cultural and creative ones. So the demand was there. We actually started – you could say *properly* – after the first CAM conference. We were *asked* to do a bookstall for that. We wrote to various publishers and asked for copies of books on sale or return, they supplied them and we never returned them! That started it and we just carried on. That was the nucleus and then we gradually established accounts with different publishers and started ordering different books...

PI Is the bookshop the primary activity nowadays?

SW It is. Really, since John retired. He hadn't been so well for the last few years. He had another heart attack in '95/'96 and if you look at our publishing list I think you'll see a general falling off in the late 1990s. What we've really been doing is publishing material that the George Padmore Institute (GPI) wants published because that means it's not just us doing the work for it. Like *The Meeting of the Continents*, like *Changing Britannia*. We've done those, and we've done some books that are by our authors that we are committed to, like Erna Brodber. But we haven't done much other publishing and that's how it's going to continue for the time being. It's only Janice and myself in the shop, and Brian is a volunteer and there are others...

PI It has been very much a family business hasn't it?

SW Yes it is a family business. But as you can see in Brian's book there's been a network of people that have been working together for 30 plus years. That's the core of the GPI, and it's also the core of New Beacon.

At the moment we are working on our website. We need one – it is the way forward these days – you must have a website. We offer an international service. These days not everyone can visit the shop, and wouldn't expect them to. Then not everybody will necessarily email with their wants. If they can actually see what we've got it makes a lot of sense.

PI I believe that part of New Beacon's ethos was not to apply for, or to accept, outside funding, like grants. New Beacon was truly independent in every sense of the word. Yet, other small independent publishers have seemingly relied on this kind of funding to survive.

SW In the *Meeting of the Continents* you can see that there were small independent presses that started and then faded, and there were ones that developed over the years like Tamarind and Peepal Tree. There are others like Akira that came and went very rapidly.

Our argument always was that it was important to be independent and it was important not to depend on grants. The only time I've ever come into contact with grants is with the GPI. It's quite impossible to run an archive – we can't *earn* money to do it – so you do need funds.

But the whole concept of the publishing and the bookselling was that it should be independent.

John's concept – which fitted in with mine, too – came, he said, from the Chinese community in Trinidad, who would start small and build up slowly. One of our themes is that we are slow builders and consolidators. We are not flash and dash. You never had with New Beacon, or with the George Padmore for that matter, the situation where you got a lot of money and you got a well furnished shop with fantastic equipment or whatever...from probably having to borrow some big amount from the bank or something like that. You built up slowly, and that's how it worked. You started with a bag of books in a bedsit, and then you were in the front room of the house, and then you were in the front of your shop here...so you did it all slowly. It was a case of ploughing the profits back in. We managed to buy this building, and that's one of the reasons why we are still here.

A number of bookshops opened up in the '70s/'80s when there was money coming from the councils into African and Caribbean or community projects. One of the conditions of the grants was that people had to be paid salaries. You'd look at their turnover and it wouldn't work. Once the grant is removed, the thing is gone.

Reading Matters was a very good community bookshop in Wood Green. It had prime spot next to the library on the high road but they depended on grants, and when their grant was withdrawn they collapsed. If you look at the history of a lot of community bookshops that depended on grants, when the grant was withdrawn or when politics changed and people said no, we are not going to put money into black books or community bookshops...then the bookshop collapsed because they hadn't actually built up the business enough to sustain it.

We always had very small salaries, or some people haven't taken a salary. For the first 15 years of New Beacon I worked for the *New Scientist*. That was my salary, which paid the mortgage. John worked for New Beacon. He probably took a small amount but not a lot. I sort of kept the house going with a proper salary.

The other thing with grants is that you are answerable to somebody else. John's perception always was that we should be independent. The Book Fair was run on the same basis. It got no grants. It was financed by people paying for the stalls, and the visitors paid for themselves and were given hospitality in people's houses. That was the perception, and that way you could do what you wanted. You didn't rely on anybody to subsidise you. Even with the GPI, OK we've got grants from the Heritage Lottery Fund and a number of other people, but they've been on our terms. Joseph Rowntree gave us the money for *The Meeting of the Continents* book which was really very generous of them. It was an expensive book to do and it would have been very difficult for us to do it without their help. Things like *Changing Britannia* we financed ourselves. It would have been difficult to find the £8,000 to fund *Meeting of the Continents* up front; *Changing Britannia* was only about £2,000. New Beacon put up £1,000, GPI put up £1,000 and with sales we got our money back. Royalties and things you pay as you go along. All our meetings here are self-financing. Without the grants, the projects will still get done, just more slowly.

That has been the attitude. Bogle had the same attitude.

Sabaar certainly had grants, and I think closed down when the grants stopped. Akira, the small publisher, obviously had a massive grant from the GLC (Greater London Council) at one point because it was publishing masses of stuff. The GLC gave a lot of money to places. Of course the GLC closed down, so I'm pretty sure Akira's grant must have been withdrawn.

PI Finally, could you talk about the different markets for your books in the UK? Do these comprise a lot of students, and have they always been primarily schools and libraries?

SW Yes it has, up to a point. But I think that students are feeling the pinch. The university course that we had the most direct relations with (at London Metropolitan), the Caribbean Studies course, they themselves have fewer students. There would be a time when students would pile into the bookshop to get their books in the autumn. It's much more in ones and twos now. It's probably to do with the fees/the course/any number of things...there's less of that market, but then there are others...

PI Have you ever published for specific markets?

SW They're all general. Except *Being Black* in a way was geared to the educational market because it was based on Roxy Harris's experience in schools, and it does have a question/answers/discussion format. Otherwise, only for some specialist, geographical markets. *For the Liberation of Nigeria* for example was pertinent to that market, but it sold here as well. They really are all general books.

Appendix Three

Transcript of an interview with Eric and Jessica Huntley, recorded 9 January 2007 at their home in West London.

Eric and Jessica Huntley were both born in Guyana and moved to Britain in the 1950s. They were active in the black struggles in Britain and the Caribbean. Together they co-founded Bogle L'Ouverture Publications and established the Walter Rodney Bookshop.

Philippa Ireland May I begin by asking whether you consider the term 'black British' to be an appropriate one in terms of literature and book publishing.

Eric Huntley The meaning of the word has gone through lots of different changes, certainly in our lifetime. In the early days when we spoke the word 'black' we meant Asians, Africans, Caribbeans, anyone with the experience of being a colonial of Britain. But then over the years it has been redefined as more and more people come in. As new generations come in they have redefined it themselves. So there is no longer that broad definition of anti-colonial experience. To call an Asian 'black' today – except for the politically active – would not be welcome. Every generation redefines and clarifies for themselves what the meaning of this term is.

PI The era in which Bogle L'Ouverture was publishing has been described a unique period that is impossible to replicate in the field of publishing. Perhaps we could move on to talk about the context in which you set up the publishing house, your motivation for doing so, and the kind of books that you published and why.

Jessica Huntley We didn't set off to be a publisher per se. It grew out of political struggles when the late Walter Rodney was banned from re-entering Jamaica after he attended a writers' conference in Toronto and the whole thing erupted in Jamaica – the university students, the community in which Walter was involved – the groundings, the Rastafarians, the downtrodden people of Jamaica...

We here had to give some further voice of protest. This was because we knew Walter from Guyana. His father, for example, was part of the political party to which I had belonged. It wasn't difficult because we were involved in political activity. So it wasn't difficult for Walter to make contact with us, or vice versa. It wasn't hard for us to gather people together to make a protest, and that's what we did.

I think it is important to know too that we met in our bedroom. Our bedroom was the office; the dressing table was the desk; the bed and the floor were the chairs. We met there and planned what we were going to do. We were going to have a demonstration outside the Jamaican office and the tourist board. The consequence of that was that a number of persons were arrested. John La Rose was one, and Selma James, Andrew Salkey... While they were arrested three or four of us went *into* the Jamaican High Commission and of course we started to make our protest there, and they got the police to bodily take us outside.

We met later on in the evening and we decided that we would publish some papers that Walter gave us when he came back to London after the ban. He never got back into Jamaica but his family were in Jamaica, living there. We lived at the time in Windermere Road – that's where it all started – in West Ealing. That's where most things happened. A number of us met, most of whom were students and workers.

EH We came out of political activity, whereas a traditional publisher [usually] starts on an entrepreneurial basis. Of course 1968 was a period of ferment.

JH We were going to publish a pamphlet. It was new to most of us (although Eric had produced magazines in Guyana). But how were we going to get the money to do it? We thought we would ask our friends to give what they could. One friend, for example, gave us £100 which was a lot of money in those days.

PI It must have been incredibly exciting having all these ideas coming together at this time.

JH Yes, because people were saying nobody would want to give and I said people *would* want to.

PI and they did...

JH they did...

EH Jessica's initiative set the tone of the publishing activity that we were going to be engaged in over the next 30 years. There was a crisis within the committee. Many felt that in order to do publishing, there was only one source of funding: to go to white people – white friends of ours – and ask them for a contribution as they were the people with the resources and some kind of wealth. Jessica felt that she could raise the money from the black community – people who she knew. It was that independent, self-reliant spirit. Some members of the committee, who felt that this was not the way forward, they gradually... Plus many of them were students and went back to the West Indies. Those persons who felt that the black community could be the main source of income to set up the publishing, they remained. So it set the *tone* of self-reliance.

JH But I think you mustn't forget that we didn't think of it as long-term. It was a political act. We were making politics, that's all.

We had a discussion where people were talking about who we were going to say we were. All kinds of different names [were suggested], until we came up with Bogle. Richard Small – who was a law student at the time – he suggested Bogle.

EH The fact that we chose the names of two outstanding people from the Caribbean – L'Ouverture... the Haitian revolution... Bogle was one of the persons hanged by the British during insurrection in the 1900s. The fact that we chose two outstanding Caribbean people was significant. It gave a tremendous boost, or launch, by *grounding* the publishing house within a revolutionary mood and spirit and activity of the Caribbean. That we combined those two names – two rebels, two activists that made a contribution – that was the *grounding*...

So it was self-independent not relying on white people to fund the company and the revolutionary base...

PI Did you ever receive funding from the white establishment?

EH In later years.

JH We've had small grants from the Arts Council. Three of our publications got contributions.

I want to go back to the term *groundings* because we were going to call the pamphlet all kinds of different names and Ewart Thomas – professor at Stamford University and a buddy of Walter's – we asked him to do the editing of the book, and he came up with the title that has remained with us, the *Groundings*. That is what Walter did with the downtrodden people, the Rastafarians, in the gullies, that's exactly what he did. So it was very pertinent of us.

PI Were you at all surprised that you carried on publishing for such a long time if it was very much for the moment to begin with?

EH One thing led to the other. One saw the possibilities as you went on. For example, four years after *Groundings* which was published in 1969, in 1973, when we moved here we had a few titles on the shelves and teachers would come in to have a look around and would say to us, we need these books in the schools. So from being a publisher, one thing led to the other and we opened a bookshop. Once you remained within that field the possibilities emerged for doing more things.

JH We were involved in political activities in a way that most of the other black publishers were not because we were doing so many other things. While activities were taking place here teachers began coming in, bringing their children. Some of our community people came to look at the books, to talk with us. We were so happy to share that, very happy. The politicals came as well.

This neighbour two doors away complained about us to the council, complained that we were lowering the tone of the street. It was a big thing. We had to go to court and all of that. Of course we mobilised support – we are politicals! Our friends outside, in Guyana and America, they wrote letters to the council.

EH What the neighbour said was that we were running a business in a residential home. Now it is common, but of course in 1973 the council had very strict rules as regards operating a business in a residential street or home and they gave us six months to move. That's how the bookshop started in 1974, when we looked for premises in Chigwell Place.

JH My second son came in one day and said, 'mum I've seen a place empty in front of a record shop. People will go to the record shop and then they will come to the bookshop'. Those were the early beginnings.

PI Obviously they were very exciting times.

JH It was, really. For example, when the *Groundings* first came out we were jolly, we were happy. It was a really wonderful experience.

John Sankey was the printer (through John La Rose who put us in touch with him). I should say too that John [La Rose] and Sarah [White], when we had first set up the books here, they bought a box of books to us and said we can pay them when we're able to. It added to our own personal collection of books that we showed. But it was theirs that we sold and not our own personal books.

PI There was obviously an incredible degree of co-operation between John La Rose and Sarah White and yourselves.

JH Oh yes. We were never working in competition. We always had a lot of support from John.

PI What were the differences between yours and John's publishing?

JH *Groundings with my Brothers* was *such* a publication. It was a political statement talking about African history. And then following *The Groundings* we did a book called *One Love* by four Jamaican writers. That too talked about blackness and the history of black people. Then of course, following that was *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. So a pattern – a line – was drawn as it were.

PI John and Sarah at New Beacon Books, Margaret Busby and yourselves are so often referred to collectively and I would be interested to find out more about the differences between each of your publishing activities because you weren't doing the same things in the same way were you?

EH It just shows you what was available really. There was room for – not only three of us, but maybe even more – and we didn't duplicate each other. I think because of the fact that we came out of a cauldron of political ferment that was taking place in the '60s... I think that put a particular stamp on us, on our publications, and what we were doing which was distinctive from John La Rose at New Beacon. Even though in the late '70s ourselves and John were involved in political activity – like the alliance of black parents – Bogle L'Ouverture had that stamp of black nationalism, black radicalism, much more than John La Rose, I think. We published some things to do with Black Power – *Groundings with my Brothers* and *How Europe* – which put that particular radical edge and stamp on our publications.

JH In addition to that, you know, the first children's book we did was called *Getting to Know Ourselves*, by Phyllis and Bernard Coard.

PI Did you always have people in mind that you publishing for?

JH We just knew that there was a vacuum.

EH We never solicited manuscripts with the exception of *Getting to Know Ourselves* – we spoke specifically with the Coards about that, and the biography series which we did later.

JH One of the things I remember saying to Bernard Coard in particular was that they, as teachers, must know what is available in the classroom, and what the black children can benefit from. I want to think that I *encouraged* that process. I think Bernard would say that, both of them [Bernard and his wife] would say that. He had never done anything like that before. But we said, you are teachers, you know what is lacking. That's how it came about. It was going to be set of three books but circumstances changed.

Even in terms of the children, we figured you must have some positiveness. And as Eric was saying...it was nationalist. There were times when it was felt that to be a nationalist was a bad thing but its not 'cos it was not exclusive. In addition we felt that other people must *know* about the history, so even though we were writing for ourselves it was not in isolation to the rest of the world.

EH We embraced Black Power naturally. We had very early contacts with the United States which was the source of the Black Power emergence. So when Stokely Carmichael and all the others came over here during the '60s we were all part of that. So our public image was quite different to New Beacon really.

We helped to bring to the international book fair, when it was started in the 1980s, that United States experience and those contacts that we established in the 1960s and '70s. It really *supplemented* what all the others were doing by showing a different dimension really to the whole effort.

PI Nothing seems to have worked in isolation at all. It was huge network of things going on so to speak, interlinked. Am I right?

EH Yes. We were involved in campaigns - New Beacon and ourselves, John and ourselves. The New Cross Massacre campaign, for example. The police brutality was terrible – the '81 riots – we were involved in defending people. So we were involved in working together for a long time.

JH Even before the publishing we were friends.

EH That network worked very well while it lasted.

PI You mentioned the riots. Did you notice any changes outside of the network or the black community that might have affected your publishing as a result of the uprisings?

EH We sold more books!

The government made funds available for urban areas, and we sold more books. Mostly to libraries... There's nothing like a revolutionary upsurge to create demand because people want to know. There is a demand for knowledge and for information: who were these black people; where are they from; what are their aspirations? Linton [Kwesi Johnson] was published, *Railton Blues* came out...

It was a good time for bookselling. All that changed when Thatcher came in.

JH It's not just that. The libraries began to make certain demands and we couldn't fulfil those demands. They wanted to us to repack, to put jackets on, our books. That's what the big library suppliers demanded of all booksellers or publishers. We couldn't fulfil that. What they'd also do, a lot of library suppliers, they would come down to the bookshop and take down publishers and so they were able to order these books directly. And whereas on a monthly basis we had to send inspection copies, we might have one little box, people like

Blackwells had got boxes and boxes. They didn't know, they didn't think...I've got a feeling that they did that to New Beacon as well.

EH The challenge was that we were community booksellers prepared for a very basic relationship with the libraries. The libraries would come with a list of books, we would order them, and we would supply them. Or, they would take books down from the shelves, we would list them, and then send them an invoice. Basic. After supplying the libraries on that kind of straight basis for a while we were able to get in on a system whereby with all the new titles coming in, the publishers sent inspection copies to the libraries once a month. All librarians would meet and go through the books and would order on that basis. The long established library suppliers, like Hudsons, they had a structure set up, long established financially and organisationally to supply libraries...they'd supply jacket covers...the whole system of supplying libraries. And of course they supplied 98% of the trade. So they were set up for that. They didn't have a bookshop, they were just library suppliers. We didn't have the resources to really engage with that. And even if we did have the resources, the quantity of books that the libraries would order from us would be so tiny that it really wouldn't have been worth our while to put aside those resources to become library suppliers in the traditional sense.

JH We didn't set up for that anyway.

EH We supplied the libraries, but not as library suppliers. But once Thatcher came in the libraries stopped ordering books and there was a decline in spending. The cut backs came into being with Thatcher.

JH It affected a lot of the radical booksellers. A lot of them couldn't continue because people weren't buying the radical books. The temperature in Britain had changed quite a lot.

EH Publishing itself changed.

JH So all of us were affected.

EH In the '80s and '90s.

PI You spoke about *Railton Blues*. Published in 1983, this book, along with New Beacon's publication of *Bad Friday*, was one of the first publications that might be described as black British fiction. Can you recall any specific details about the publication of this particular book and why you decided to publish it?

EH It's what was coming out of the British black scene.

We never went out of our way to ask for manuscripts. People saw us as publishers and had some kind of image of the kinds of things we were looking for. But I must say that deep down, coming from the Caribbean – the Caribbean have had a very long and outstanding history of fiction writing: a whole range of novelists in the '50s, '60s, and '70s, but they were people who were born in the West Indies, and although there was a lot of poetry coming out from Britain in the '60s – we were silently hoping that the Caribbean tradition of the novel would come through on the British scene by youngsters who were born or growing up here. They were writing a lot of poetry, but not fiction, and were wondering when this would take place. We knew it was there, germinating. But we couldn't tell from where it would come. So when *Railton Blues* emerged, and of course John's *Bad Friday* emerged, and the rest of the fiction coming out of the British scene, it wasn't a surprise. It validated our own expectations that somewhere along the line that tradition hadn't been lost.

Even though we were writing and publishing – publishing was the main activity – during the mid-late '70s, the bookshop held a number of activities and workshops where schools brought in children – secondary age children – and you had a lot of the youngsters who were born here and who were growing up here doing sessions with drummers and story-tellers at the bookshop. So the bookshop was really a hive of *nurturing* young talent. We were nurturing the talent, not only in the writing scene but in other fields as well.

We had book launches. All our books were launched at the bookshop and they were massive cultural events. It was crammed with people. Louise Bennett, Selvon, Salkey, Linton were there...

JH All of our Caribbean writers were at the bookshop at one time or another. The only exception was V.S. Naipaul.

EH The bookshop was a cultural centre really: like an oasis [in West London]. You see North London has always been a centre of sorts of radical activity; West London was very much like a desert really. And people came into the bookshop during the riots to get help – for solicitors or to ask if we knew of any accommodation. It was really like a cultural and community centre.

PI So by having the launches and so forth, it didn't really matter that you weren't getting the reviews in the mainstream press.

JH *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, for example, we had a two line review – 'its propaganda', that's what they called it, and they just dismissed it like that. We never relied upon the media to sell our books. I used to go and sell books. We did posters as well. I used to go to The Grove and I'd go to parties and I've have my book or my leaflet in the bag.

EH We printed greeting cards. We were the first to print black greeting cards (by Errol Lloyd). Posters too. The image that we set – the black greeting cards, the black posters, mother and child – we were the first. Black and white people in this country never saw images of black people.

EH We had connections with people who *worked* in Heinemann rather than Heinemann as publishers in any official sense. We knew people. They'd be working in marketing in Heinemann, Macmillan, Longman, Nelsons...or in distribution. So it meant we'd be able to ring them up and say Maya Angelou (The Women's Press) is coming over for lecture and we'd like a hundred copies to do an exhibition, or we are doing a teacher's conference in Wales we would like to do an exhibition of African titles...the African Writers Series or Caribbean Writers Series. And these young people who were in the marketing would facilitate delivery quickly. It was direct link into the publishing world. Whereas traditionally you just send order in to somebody you don't know and it would go through the system and take a long time.

JH In addition to that, for example, I remember talking to The Women's Press or Virago, and they were always willing to share. We also had a conference, Greater Access to Publishing, a three-day conference and it was highly successful. One got to know personally a lot of those people Eric mentioned. When Alice Walker came to this country for the first time, we were invited to a party and we went. The persons who invited us to the party thought they were going to introduce me to Alice, but I had already met Alice in California. Through Walter Rodney, Alice Walker's publicist and a librarian by the name of Daphne Muse had come and stay with us in Windermere Road. They ran an outfit called Drum and Spear in New York. It was a massive thing, and they shared a lot of ideas as to what they did at Drum and Spear. It was a powerful organisation. One of the things they had encouraged is that, particularly with children's books, to try and read them to make certain the books the children read are not books that would put them down.

EH One of the interesting things that took place at that time was, as a result of Jessica's contact in the States, we were the first to import the American women's titles. Well, American titles generally, but particularly women's titles. So all the names that became household names in the '80s, their books were available in hardback in the States and we were the ones who imported them and sold them in the bookshop. We marketed them here and bought them to the attention of the public here which gave Women's Press and Virago – who had the money – opportunity to print and to have contracts with them and to publish paperback editions. But the libraries bought hardback copies of all of them...Angelou, Walker...in hardback! We were the catalyst.

Maybe if we'd have had the resources we'd have seen the potential which is exactly what the Women's Press and Virago did – had the vision. Plus we weren't in that ball game at all. It's a different scene. It's just one of those things.

PI Could you perhaps speak a bit about the attacks on the bookshops?

JH It was a period when the National Front were making a mark in the country. So the first morning I went and saw the shop, I was shocked of course. I phoned Eric to say what I'd seen. Eric came right away. They broke the window and they threatened us and told us to leave. But immediately we called the forces – the alliance – and we started having meetings and drew in the community and marched to the home office. Bookshop Joint Action was formed. We made contact with all the radical booksellers. All of them had a spat of something. They fired a bookshop in Brixton you know. We put out a leaflet saying we would not be terrorised out of existence. The community policeman came. Anyway, then it was coming onto election time and one Saturday morning the mayor and the deputy mayor, they all turned up – they were making politics. They wanted to show solidarity. When it was happening they didn't, but come the election they did. They bought a photographer but I stayed away from the photographer.

But it didn't frighten us. We said we wouldn't be terrorised out of existence. Members of the community wanted to sleep in the bookshop to wait for them and I said no, that's not such a nice idea. We weren't scared by the threats, serious threats: leaflets, KKK, many, many phone calls...

EH The attitude of the police was very significant. They came hours after Jessica phoned them. But their general attitude, not only with ourselves but with all the other attacks, was they would ask you 'do you have any enemies'. They would actually put you in the dock rather than asking questions to with the perpetrators. We did say we are paying rates here we would expect to get some kind of protection and they said, 'do you think you are Buckingham Palace?' But that was the general attitude. So they did nothing at all. What helped us through was the fact that we didn't see it as a personal attack and keep quiet about it. We immediately contacted our support within the community, within the alliance and overseas. That helped to give us a bit of perspective.

PI I have really got the impression through our discussion today that there was a truly international aspect to all of your activities.

EH We tried to maintain contacts. And how we came about...Rodney in Jamaica, Tanzania (*How Europe* was published together with Tanzania), we were involved in Grenada, most of the major campaigns – there was always that link with overseas which was continued throughout. The overseas people who came to the book fair, we had contacts with them...from the States, Africa, the Caribbean...it was always a significant part of our work really.

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